

# Impact of Illiteracy on HRD in the SAARC Region



SAARC Human Resource Development Centre  
Islamabad - Pakistan

# **Impact of Illiteracy on HRD in the SAARC Region**

**Jointly conducted by:**

**Comparative Education Society of Nepal - Nepal  
And  
Institute for Research, Advocacy and Development - Pakistan**

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## **Foreword**

The research study on Impact of Illiteracy on HRD in the SAARC Region is part of process to fulfill research programme sequence of the SAARC Human Resources Development Centre [SHRDC] for the year 2015. The main objective of the study was to review the relevant policies and programs to combat illiteracy, and to examine determinants of illiteracy with respect to HRD in various setups across the region. The study also presented strategies to improve the regional scenario. The study has discussed in detail that how the challenges and issues related to transformation of this phenomenon could be tackled and turned out in favor of interest of the SAARC Member States in terms of opportunities within the region or respective countries. The research study investigated the dynamics of the future projections of literacy for HRD in SAARC region. The Research team has also examined the roles of governments, educationists, and policy makers to cater the needs of HRD in the SAARC region.

The consequences of illiteracy are many and harmful in several respects. As well as affecting illiterate individuals themselves in their daily lives and often jeopardizing their future, this scourge has a significant effect on society, both socially and economically. Since literacy is an essential tool for individuals and states to be competitive in the new global knowledge economy, many positions remain vacant for lack of personnel adequately trained to hold them; the higher the proportion of adults with low literacy proficiency is, the slower the overall long-term GDP growth rate is; and the difficulty understanding societal issues lowers the level of community involvement and civic participation

Although, most of the Member States are focusing on education, but the HRD gaps created, has brought severe injections in their labour economies. The Member States has developed policies, programs and strategies to combat illiteracy, but need of time is to address illiteracy to fulfill core objectives of enriching the region with literate and highly developed human resources. This will ultimately, strengthen the regional economies and reduce vulnerabilities in favor of the poor in the SAARC region.

I believe that findings of the research study will provide a helping hand to the policy makers, government officials, researchers, academia and institutions working on illiteracy, education, HRD, and skill gaps.

**Dr. Riffat Aysha Anis**  
Director-SHRDC

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## Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AECs	Adult Education Centers
AIDS	Acquired Immune Efficiency Syndrome
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BECS	Basic Education Community School
BRAC	Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CESON	Comparative Education Society of Nepal
CLC	Community Learning Center
DIET	District Institutes of Education and Training
DPE	Directorate of Primary Education
EBBs	Educationally Backward Blocks
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECED	Early Childhood Education
EFA	Education for All
EWLP	Experimental World Literacy Program
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GNH	Gross National Happiness
GNI	Gross National Income
GNP	Gross National Product
GPI	Gender Parity Index
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HRD	Human Resource Development
HSSC	Higher Secondary School Certificate
ICT	Information, Communication and Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IRADA	Institute for Research, Advocacy and Development
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MDM	Mid-Day Meal
MOE	Ministry of Education
MoLJCAPA	Ministry of Law and Justice, Constituent Assembly & Parliamentary Affairs
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NFEC	Non-formal Education Centers
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIOS	National Institute for Open Schooling
NLAP	National Literacy Action Plan
NLM	National Literacy Mission
NLSS	Nepal Living Standards Survey
NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
NSQF	National Skill Qualification Framework
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper



RTE	Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SCs	Scheduled Castes
SDG	SAARC Development Goals
SHRDC	SAARC Human Resource Development Centre
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
SSRP	School Sector Reform Program
STs	Scheduled Tribes
TK	Taka
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UTs	Union Territories
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WB	World Bank
WDI	World Development Indicators

## Executive Summary

The illiteracy scenario in the SAARC region is grim. Although regional governments have planned various programs to handle illiteracy, especially in rural areas and among females but number of social, economic and cultural hindrances prevails. Illiteracy hampers regional development perspective through which region reproduced across various phases. The SAARC region may consider illiteracy due to weak economic growth owed to unproductive and unskilled/ semi-skilled labour force. At the country level, illiteracy is correlated to weaker returns in earning and a less informed existence. The contemporary world scenario brings modern openings and tasks, and only those countries can get benefit, which have acquainted with modern skills and expertise. There are millions of education institutions across the region, of which merely few number cater to rural children and girls.

In the SAARC region, the illiterates have to tackle lots of social issues perilous labour, prone to unhealthy circumstances, low cadre, and low productivity etc. Illiteracy of the elders in the families hampers the younger at various spheres of life including their career counseling, future endeavors, personality grooming and professional cadres. The younger, due to high dropout rates in the SAARC region, are unlikely to finish their education themselves. Illiteracy and dropout ratio has hampered human resource development process, productivity and economic development process. Skills, knowledge, talent has been declared key parameter in contemporary labour markets. Although, modern day working patterns depends largely on machines, but there is no substitute for skilled man without them, the whole system gets handicapped.

In the SAARC region, illiteracy restrains human development, whereas poverty, underdevelopment, social discrimination and disease are always co-incident with illiteracy. Although successive governments have adopted various strategies to promote literacy but they have faced number of challenges to implement properly. Illiteracy remained central facet to daunt HRD policies in the region. The emerging global scenario offers immense opportunities and challenges, but only those countries can get benefit which have acquired required literacy, knowledge and developed human resources. The findings of this study are expected to enable the policy makers and programme implementers to revisit their education policies and find ways for improvement. Further they would be able to draw parameters between illiteracy and HRD and adopt comprehensive policy recommendations to address the issue.

Kabeer [2002] studied that lack of education and skills undermine returns to labour. Those who lack assets, education and social networks tend to be in the worst paid and most casual segments of the labour and commodity markets, engaging in a multiplicity of intermittent, seasonal and/or poorly paid activities to survive. World Bank [2007] reported that South Asia's stock of human capital is clearly still low compared with that in other parts of the world. However, the evidence indicates continuous skills up-gradation in the region over time. Trends in enrolment rates over time could answer many questions raised, but the limited availability of household surveys at different points in time for all countries in the region makes the use of enrolment rates to compare trends over time difficult.

Dhar and Samanta [2014] reported that in order to benefit from the demographic changes that are afoot in the region, South Asia needs to accord priority to building its human capital base. This factor becomes even more imperative with skill intensive services emerging as the drivers of the economies in the region. Countries in South Asia would, therefore, have to shift their priorities in the education sector, and have to go beyond the primary education, which has been the focus of their policy in this sector.

In Afghanistan, with a global commitment for the EFA [Education for All] and MDGs [Millennium Development Goals] in 2000 more than 7 million children during 2001 to 2013 [from 1 million to 8 million] are enrolled with the establishment of 12,000 new general schools, 39 percent of them are girls. The number of teachers has also significantly increased from 110,000 in 2007 to around 187,000 in 2013 of which 32 percent are females. Bangladesh has made significant strides in different indicators of human development. In addition to expanding access to basic education, gender parity has been achieved in enrolment at both primary and secondary levels [GOB, 2011]. Life expectancy has risen to 67.7 years in 2011. The country is poised to enjoy a 'demographic dividend' with a decreasing dependency of non-working to working age population with an increment of 3.3 percent per year [GoB, 2013].

In Bhutan, modern education began to be developed in 1961, with the country's First Five-Year Plan. Despite this late start, Bhutan has made impressive progress in gender parity in access to education. For example, in 1970 for every 100 boys enrolled in primary school, only 2 girls were enrolled but by 2013, for every 100 boys enrolled in primary school, 101 girls were enrolled. There are more girls than boys, even at the secondary level [classes 7–10], with a GPI [Gender Parity Index] of 1.08, or 108 girls for every 100 boys. In less than 50 years, Bhutan has achieved gender parity in access to basic education [i.e., pre-primary through class 10]. India has made considerable progress in improving literacy rate among population aged 7 and more during the period 2001–2011. The literacy rate among population aged 7 and above increased from 64.8 percent in 2001 to 72.9 percent in 2011. During the period 2001 to 2011, a total of 202.75 million persons [98.11 male and 104.64 female] were made literate. The adult literacy rate has also shown an upward trend. During the same period, the adult literacy rate has increased from 61 percent in 2001 to 69.3 percent in 2011.

The Maldives is a success story in the attainment of adult literacy. The literacy rate for the country is 94 percent. A literate population produces a broad array of economic and social benefits, and is of central importance for development [World Bank, 2011]. The Maldives is one of the best performing countries among developing nations, with an adult literacy rate well above the expected value for its level of per capita income. The Maldives has the highest adult literacy rate in South Asia. In Nepal, the disparities in literacy rates between men and women, urban and rural areas, among caste and ethnicity, and different regions has shown low literacy rate for aged 5+ in the mountain [60.45 percent] and Terai region [61.1 percent] compared to hill region [72 percent]. The census has also reported 17.7 percent point gap between males [75.1 percent] and females [57.4] and 19.74 percent point gap between rural [62.48 percent] and urban [82.22 percent] for the age group 5 and above years. In case of adults, the rate for female lags 22.9 percent point behind the male.

The educational indicators of Pakistan are still low, although steady progress has been noticed during last few decades. At present, about one third primary school age children are out of school, 42 percent population [age 10+] is illiterate. Wide discrepancies persist in education indicators pertaining to provinces/areas, location [urban vs. rural] and gender. At the national level, about two third women of age 15+ cannot read and write, and 35 percent girls remain out of school. Gender Parity Index in case of participation in primary education is 0.82. It is estimated that over 6.7 million children are out of school, and majority of them [62 percent] are girls. In Sri Lanka, the results of the social welfare measures pursued by successive governments after independence, to which free education and health services have made a remarkable contribution.

Sri Lanka has a good education system with 98.3 percent primary enrollment with less than 0.23 percent drop-out rate. Secondary education enrollment and completion rate is almost 98.5 percent. The literary rate is 94.5 percent with 75 percent population completing the secondary education. Student teacher ratio

[17:1] is the lowest in the SAARC countries. Most of the schools have sanitary facilities [96.4 percent], school library [64 percent] and computer facilities. The general education span is of 13 years' duration from age 5 to 18 years. At present education is compulsory from 5 to 14 years. A policy decision has been taken to increase the upper age limit to 16 years.

Article 43 of the Constitution of 2004 of Afghanistan stipulates that education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan, which shall be offered free of charge up to the BA level [e.g. undergraduate level] in the state educational institutes. One of the objectives of education is to eliminate illiteracy and provide grounds for accelerated learning for the children and adults who are left behind from the school in the country. State institutions run the literacy courses and community-based education. In Bangladesh, the Education Policy 2010 proposes raising compulsory primary education to grade 8 by 2018 and expanding vocational/technical training. A recently approved literacy project [February 2014] will be the first major adult literacy project since 2003 and is expected to serve 4.5 million young adults as literate human resource in 3 years. The Sixth Five-Year National Development Plan [2011-16] and a perspective plan for ten years up to 2021 were formulated to begin implementation of the vision for development.

In Bhutan, education has been considered as an important part of the religious life [Sing, 2002] where community schools are used for adult literacy and other non-formal educational programs. Bhutan 2020 enunciates the vision, to provide a quality education, that ensures the realization of the innate potential of each and every child; instills an awareness of the nation's unique cultural heritage, and values, both traditional and universal; prepares young people for the world of work, instilling in them the dignity of labour; and creates an awareness of the potential and importance of agriculture as an occupation. In India, the RTE Act, 2009 was amended in 2012 which came into force with effect from 1 August 2012. The Amendment Act inter alia provides for: [i] inclusion of children with disability as contained in the Persons with Disabilities Act 2005 and the National Trust Act under the purview of RTE Act and providing them free and compulsory education, and providing option for home-based education for children with severe disability; [ii] protection of the rights of minorities provided under Article 29 and 30 of the Constitution while implementing the RTE Act; [iii] exemption of Madrasas, Vedic Pathshalas and educational institutions imparting religious instruction from the RTE Act.

In Maldives, in 2009 the Education Act was prepared, and established a strong legal framework for the provision of education from preschool to higher education. It stated the provision of compulsory education, the establishment of school boards to support decentralization of education management, set standards for higher education providers, and requirement for teacher registration and duties and responsibilities of duty bearers. The Literate Nepal Mission as the national mass literacy campaign targets to all children, youths and adults who due to whatsoever reasons missed access to formal education with the three key strategies [MoE, 2012]. These strategies include: i] System of non-formal education, with provisions of outside formal educational settings has been developed to address adult literacy, basic education for out of school children, life skills, income generation related education activities; ii] literate Nepal as a policy to incorporate in the main education policies as well as in national level plans like school sector reform plan and also to establish literacy as a priority among I/NGOs and CBOs that work at local level; and, iii] legislative framework to implement free and compulsory basic education and free secondary education as rights to every citizen and community.

The Government of Pakistan follows the EFA National Plan of Action [2001-15] but has not been successful due to lack of financial support, both indigenous and external. Similarly, another National Plan of Action [2013-16] was formulated in 2013 to accelerate progress towards education related goals

and targets identified by MDG/EFA for 2015-16. The plan aims at enhancing enrolment of out-of-school children in primary education; increasing retention at primary level and completion of primary education by all enrolled children; and improving quality of primary education. Sri Lanka aims for human resource development by: i] educating for productive work that enhances the quality of life of the individual and the nation and contributes to the economic development; ii] preparing individuals to adapt to and manage change, and to develop capacity to cope with complex and unforeseen situation in a rapidly changing world; and iii] fostering attitudes and skills that will contribute to securing an honorable place in the international community, based on justice, equality and mutual respect.

In this region, still there are challenges of poverty, illiteracy, weak human capital etc. Because of this poverty, illiteracy is going upwards. On other hand, in formal education, it is difficult to calculate the economic value with the quality of teacher because of diversified society, our social-political situation and less availability of quality resources. The teacher's role is magnified with other role too. They are not only a school subordinate but in addition a social and political leader and activist of NGO, and serving the huge masses of poor and illiterate one [UNICEF, 2010]. Still the investment and rational distribution of resource such as teachers, learning materials, book and other facility in rural and urban slums has a big gap. Child laborer is another challenge in South Asian nations.

The governments of the SAARC Member States have planned number of policies and programs to combat illiteracy, especially in rural areas, among females in spite of prevailing number of social, economic and cultural hindrances. It is accepted that access to education is the basic right of every citizen. It is most important tool for developing skilled HR, and for achieving the sustainable economic growth. Illiteracy has been proved as one of the key element which also sustain as counterweight to societal and economic motion forwarded by prevailing preferences. The SAARC region may consider illiteracy for weak economic growth due to unproductive and unskilled/ semi-skilled labour force. At the country level, illiteracy is correlated to weaker returns in earning. The contemporary world scenario brings modern openings and tasks, and only those countries can get benefit, which have acquainted with modern skills and expertise. There are millions of education institutions across the region, of which merely few number cater to rural children and girls.

In the SAARC region, the illiterates have to tackle lots of social issues, prone to unhealthy circumstances, low cadre, low productivity etc. Illiteracy of the elders in the families hampers the younger at various spheres of life including their career counseling, future endeavors, personality grooming and professional cadres. The greater a mother's schooling, the fewer behavioral problems her children will exhibit, and the lower their repetition rate will be.

Poor families often prioritize work against education, due to the opportunity cost of the latter. The pressing need to work, in order to assist support their families, is the chief cause of school dropout among young people. Moreover, the temptation to leave school is increased by the perception that those who complete their education are not rewarded with wages and job prospects. Poor youth are more inclined to leave school as a result. Illiteracy and dropout ratio has hampered HRD process, productivity and economic development process. Although, modern day working patterns depends largely on machines, but need of skilled human empower the whole system.

Improving girls' participation in education and development interventions need to be equally prioritized in all the SAARC countries as a part of school reform. Education system in most of the region has achieved gender parity at primary level but still lagging behind at secondary and tertiary levels. Governments in the region are tackling this issue by introducing targeted measures aimed at promoting equity in education.



The SAARC system can be used as effective platform and futuristic opportunity for sharing common contemporary development in socio-economic context and similar educational development challenges – to articulate policy objectives, goals and strategies for post-2015 education agenda. A common framework for the South Asia position can be articulated as the discourse on post-2015 education agenda continue in the run-up in line with the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] 2030. The poor and the disadvantaged must not be left out from a resurgent and emerging South Asian century. All Member States should have stake in it and claim their due by expanding their own capabilities through combating illiteracy.

## **Outcome of Primary Data**

In this study the outcomes of primary data are mostly in line with the findings of the secondary data collected through literature reviewed. The findings indicate that 64 percent of the respondents were familiar with the policies and programs, 30 percent familiar to some extent, whereas 6 percent doesn't know at all about the programs and policies of their respective governments to combat illiteracy. Among the respondents who were familiar with the policies and programs of education 37 percent appreciated, 33 percent were contented to some extent and 30 percent were not satisfied from these policies and programme to combat illiteracy.

With regard to the policies to improve literacy rates respondents had many opinions on measures to improve literacy rates, 58 percent viewed that there is need for more trained teachers, 47 percent said education should be totally free, and 44 percent replied that infrastructure of educational institutions should be improved. Increase in number of teachers was view of 37 percent, distance of school [33 percent], and security and free books/uniform should be provided by schools as viewed by 28 percent; 25 percent responded that water and sanitation should be prioritized in policies, 24 said that there should be provision of one school meal, 17 percent replied that pick and drop services may be provided to the students, and 17 percent had other reasons including separate education system for girls and boys, scholarship, religious education, cultural hurdles etc. [multiple responses].

There is need for vocational education to decrease illiteracy and to improve skills as felt by 69 percent of the respondents, 29 percent agreed that it helps to some extent, whereas, 2 percent disagreed. In response to reasons for illiteracy 71 percent of the respondents viewed that poverty is the most significant reason of illiteracy, 39 percent said that lack of parents' awareness, and according to 39 percent lack of enabling environment are the contributing factors. Student are not interested as responded by 35 percent, less number of educational institutions as reported by 33 percent, distance of school from home as replied by 24 percent, and 12 percent mentioned other reasons including child labour, gender discrimination, teachers attitude etc. [Multiple responses].

In response to measures needed to combat declining enrollment 71 percent of respondents replied that it can be combated by motivating students, 48 percent said improvement in teachers' attitude, 47 percent said parents' counseling, and 33 percent viewed by providing school meals. Similarly, 30 percent said teachers' availability, 25 percent change exams system, 23 percent fees structures, 18 percent said water and sanitation issues and 10 percent mentioned other issues including gender discrimination, early marriage, student beating etc. [Multiple responses]. What measures may be adopted for students to stay enrolled 66 percent of the respondents viewed that motivating students, 56 percent said reviewing the examination system and 46 percent replied no punishment. Media may be used to influence students as replied by 35 percent, 24 percent said that free education, and 7 percent responded that other measures like teachers' attitude, female teachers, parents' awareness etc. [Multiple responses].

Rural areas are severely affected by the illiteracy across the region in this regard 66 percent respondents viewed that increasing number of schools will improve the situation, 56 percent said motivating parents, 53 percent said better infrastructure is needed, 48 percent said motivating girls, and 26 replied that following local norms can bring the change. All family participate in harvesting crops so 19 percent said that harvesting schedules may followed, 6 percent mentioned other reasons including family/relatives oppression, gender discrimination, child labour etc. [Multiple responses].

Stipend and school-meals can help to address the child labour issues, as viewed by 65 percent of the respondents, 29 percent said that to some extent, and 6 percent declined. Increase in girls' enrollment will help to decrease female literacy rates as it is one of the major issues in the region, in this context, 78 percent respondents were of the opinion that parents' counseling may bring desirable results, 71 percent said motivation, 44 percent supported social security, and 34 percent said that scholarships for girls'. Distance to schools also matters a lot as replied by 31 percent, 28 percent said pick and drop service, 19 percent said separate education is preferred by girls' families, 16 percent said increase in number of schools, and 7 percent mentioned other reasons including motivating father/brother, religious schooling, female teachers etc. [Multiple responses].

Illiteracy impact human resource development in many ways as responded by 76 percent of respondents as illiteracy bring only un-skilled labour in the labor market, 72 percent said that workers not efficient, 58 percent said that they are less productive, and 48 percent replied that illiteracy bring poor career counseling. Illiteracy also increase unemployment in the market, 31 percent said that it provides less exposure to the labor force, and 6 percent had other reasons including poor health, gender discrimination, poverty etc. [Multiple responses].

In light of the study outcome, it is concluded that there is immense need to improve the education system in the region to reduce illiteracy and increase the school enrolment that also supports the economic development in the long run. Therefore, the policy makers should focus on essential structural reforms for the development of a knowledge-based economy which promote literacy for disadvantaged groups. Regular trainings of teachers, awareness of parents, motivation of community, child care, increase in school enrolment, counseling are needed to address illiteracy in the respective communities.

The government may also focus to improve situation of security, water, sanitation, school buildings etc. to retain enrolment and encourage parents to send their children to schools for education. Number of both public and private vocational schools may be increased for higher employment in the poor localities, specifically in cities where poverty rates are higher.

## 1. Background/ Introduction

About half of the world's illiterate and 22 percent of the world's population live in the SAARC region. Different studies have revealed that illiteracy has been a main hurdle for development and prosperity of the SAARC region. The respective governments of the SAARC countries have introduced the policies to combat illiteracy; however implementation of these policies has always been a question mark.

Illiteracy means primitive manual unskilled labour force in the sectors of agriculture, industry, services with uncertain employment opportunities and low wages, life-long miserable living, and humiliating dependence on the literates for the day-to-day civic interactions. Illiteracy also excludes from most of economic, social and cultural activities in life span. Illiteracy generates forced labour, vagrancy and slavery.

The illiteracy scenario in the SAARC region is grim. Although regional governments have planned various programs to handle illiteracy, especially in rural areas and among females but number of social, economic and cultural hindrances prevails. It is universal declaration and officiated that access to education is the basic right of every citizen. It is most important instrument for developing human capital, and for achieving the required targets of sustainable economic growth. This enables masses to make well-versed selections, broaden their vision and opportunities and to dominate with public voice. Illiteracy has been proved as one of the key element which also sustain as counterweight to societal and economic motion forwarded by prevailing preferences. Illiteracy hampers regional development perspective through which region reproduced across various phases. The SAARC region may consider illiteracy for low economic growth due to unproductive and unskilled/ semi-skilled labour force. At the country level, illiteracy is correlated to weaker returns in earning. The contemporary world scenario brings modern openings and tasks, and only those countries can get benefit, which have acquainted with modern skills and expertise. There are millions of education institutions across the region, of which merely few number cater to rural children and girls.

Illiteracy is defined as blue-collar labour force working in the agriculture, industry and services sectors having uncertain employment status. It brings low earnings, poor working status and lifelong dependence on literate class of workers. In certain cases, illiteracy is one of leading causes of excluding illiterates from labour market. Illiteracy has been the key reasons of weak human capital in the SAARC region.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of SAARC Region**

Country	Population	Population growth [%]	Poverty headcount [Ratio]	Male literacy	Female literacy
Afghanistan	31.6	3.0	35.8	45.4	17.6
Bangladesh	159	1.2	31.5	63.1	56.2
Bhutan	0.77	1.4	12	-	-
India	1295	1.2	21.9	78.88	59.3
Maldives	1.78	0.36	-	-	-
Nepal	28.2	1.21	25.2	48.9	71.7
Pakistan	185	2.1	-	69.9	43.1
Sri Lanka	20.6	0.76	6.7	92.6	90.0
South Asia	1721	1.36	-	57	76

Source: World Development Indicators, 2015



In the SAARC region, the illiterates have to tackle lots of social issues perilous labour, prone to unhealthy circumstances, low cadre, and low productivity etc. Illiteracy of the elders in the families hampers the younger at various spheres of life including their career counselling, future endeavours, personality grooming and professional cadres. The younger's, due to high dropout ratio in the SAARC region, are unlikely to finish their education themselves. Mediavilla and Calero [2007] studied that completion of primary education by parents raises the number of years of schooling of children by 1.02 and 2.51 years, depending on the country. Carneiro, Meghir and Parey [2007] noted that, the greater a mother's schooling, the fewer behavioural problems her children will exhibit, and the lower their repetition rate [repeat class/level] will be.

Marinho [2007] stated that poor families often place work before education, due to the opportunity cost of the latter. The pressing need to work, in order to help support their families, is the chief cause of school dropout among young people. Moreover, the temptation to leave school is increased by the perception that those who complete their education are not rewarded with wages and job prospects. Poor youth are more inclined to leave school as a result.

Illiteracy and dropout ratio has hampered human resource development process, productivity and economic development process. Skills, knowledge, talent has been declared key parameter in contemporary labour markets. Although, modern day working patterns depends largely on machines, but need of skilled human empower the whole system, and handicapped without the requisite skills.

Illiteracy is a key determinant of earning, because it indirectly decreases working and earning capacity of individuals. It also keeps them inarticulate about labour market framework and updates hence become hurdle in progress and prosperity in their career uplifting. Illiteracy impacts worker's status in the professional hierarchy and the ability to switch toward better job or to search new jobs in labour market. It also leads towards unemployment. It also keeps labourers away from technical trainings and skills. The Youngers who fail to start schooling, even it's free in the SAARC region have lower chance of getting placement in market to improve family poor status. Table 1 shows the unemployment status of person with primary education in the SAARC countries.

**Table 2: Unemployment with Primary Education in the SAARC Region**

County	Percent	Year
Afghanistan	-	-
Bangladesh	33	2005
Bhutan	43	2012
India	12	2010
Maldives	-	-
Nepal	-	-
Pakistan	15	2008
Sri Lanka	45	2008

Source: WDI, World Bank, 2015

The correlation between illiteracy and society are strong and reinforces each other. In contemporary circumstances, illiteracy cracks the decision-making of labourer, inactive and passive participation in social working life.

The illiterate worker suffers from low motivation, innovation, self-believe, is more dependent and is less able to understand vital working environment. The illiterate persons ultimately stayed beyond from the

certain rights due to their limited knowledge and access. These rights are bestowed to them by privilege laws and regulations. Illiteracy disables the individuals to inactively promote the rights which are indispensable to human dignity.

The illiterate has feeble access to information on public and institutional regulations, this makes him to less protected toward their interests as per their fundamental needs. Illiteracy also disables female to access their domains which had formerly been the exclusive sphere of the literate males in the region. Literate class is more dominant in rural areas; it makes them heard in rural communities because rural illiteracy is wide phenomena in South Asian rural areas. In many cases, illiterate avoid being active participant in the civic events to uplift their wellbeing, attain resources, and family better off. It is privilege fact that literate people dare more in community activity, leadership, and helpful citizens to others.

UNESCO [2010] in a report on 'the social and economic impact of illiteracy' highlighted historical perspective of the subject and reported that in 1948, the acquisition of a broad range of skills was officially recognized as a fundamental aspect of human rights and personal fulfilment. These skills include reading, writing and numeracy [UNESCO, 2006]. Ten years later, at the UNESCO General Conference in Paris, the term "illiterate" was defined as someone who is unable to read and write a simple statement about his or her daily life. This criterion has become the standard approach for national censuses. Since then, the official yardstick for illiteracy has been the reply of census respondents when asked whether they can read and write [Infante, 2000]. Those who state that they are unable to do so are classified as complete illiteracy.

The literate/illiterate dichotomy oversimplifies the issue, however, reducing literacy to a minimal group of reading and writing skills, without taking into account the gradual manner in which such skills are acquired, or their use in different social contexts. Its usefulness from a policy and practical standpoint has come into question, as it misrepresents the challenge literacy entails [Fransman, 2008]. During the second half of the twentieth century, as formal education became widespread and major literacy campaigns got underway, the concept of illiteracy began to change. In the mid-1960s, the concept of functional illiteracy began to gain acceptance, and literacy objectives became more complex, shifting toward the acquisition and development of the communication skills needed to participate in social life and production.

The UNESCO report further added that the concept of functional literacy became the cornerstone of the Experimental World Literacy Programme [EWLP]. This programme, created at the 1966 UNESCO General Conference, focused on the acquisition of basic skills through experience and work-oriented learning. Literacy programmes during this period were usually associated with economic initiatives; their role was to help achieve the objectives of those programmes and motivate the population [Bhola and Valdivieso, 2008; Torres, 2006; UNESCO, 2006]. In September 1975, an International Symposium for Literacy was held in Persepolis to assess the results of the literacy policies of the 1960s. The number of illiterates was found to be constantly growing, and the impact of literacy programs was judged to be far short of what was required. According to the Declaration of Persepolis, this "reflects the failure of development policies that are indifferent to man and to the satisfaction of his basic needs" [UNESCO, 1975]. This critical assessment paved the way for new thinking in the field. The new discourses which had been developing since the late 1960s questioned the idea that literacy should be associated almost exclusively with human production output.

The Declaration of Persepolis led to a change in the way literacy was interpreted. It was no longer to be seen as a technical skill whose sole purpose was to ensure economic productivity. The concept of functional literacy took on a new meaning; it was now defined as a broad, diverse range of activities for which literacy is required, in order to ensure that a group or community can function effectively and continue to employ reading, writing and numeracy as a path to individual and collective development [UNESCO, 2006]. The World Declaration on Education for All, issued in Jomtien in 1990 and ratified in Dakar in 2002, situated literacy in a broader context: the satisfaction of basic educational needs. According to UNESCO, "These needs comprise both essential learning tools [such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving] and the basic learning content [such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes] required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning" [UNESCO, 2006].

Education has become the major component in new market framework, and it has been recognized as essential factor of production and economic growth. Human capital theory confirms that education is a kind of present investment for future multiplicative output. More education ensures more wages. The significance of human capital theory is defined in its description of education as an investment which not only has affirmative impact on persons' income, but it also at large on society, growing employment, economic progress and social equity.

Development practitioners consider illiteracy as hurdle in the process of HRD, and deem expenditure on education as social investment in the region. This belief leads us to the interrogation of the contribution of education to economic development and escalates the theory of connection with historical perspectives for its significance. Now a day, studies on literacy are dominated by economic and business studies. Most accounts depend on inferences drawn from the past of development of educational institutions, and supported by a few contemporary and modern studies of the literacy of a limited number of groups.

In the SAARC region, illiteracy restrains human development, whereas poverty, underdevelopment, social discrimination and disease are always co-incident with illiteracy. Although successive governments have adopted various strategies to promote literacy but they have faced number of challenges to implement properly. Illiteracy remained central facet to daunt HRD policies in the region. The emerging global scenario offers immense opportunities and challenges, but only those countries can get benefit which have acquired required literacy, knowledge and developed human resources.

The findings of this study are expected to enable the policy makers and programme implementers to revisit their education policies and ways for improvement. Further they would be able to draw parameters between illiteracy and HRD and adopt comprehensive policy recommendations to address the issue.

The objectives of the study are to focus on:

- Reviewing the relevant policies and programs to combat illiteracy
- Examining determinants of illiteracy with respect to HRD in various setups across the region,
- Devising strategies to improve the scenario of the region.

These objectives have been addressed by reviewing the relevant literature that has been recognized internationally and in the SAARC region and has focused on cons of the illiteracy. To further annex towards core objectives, case studies have been prepared and country wise data and information underlined with a comprehensive section on illiteracy impact on social and economic policies of the SAARC Member States.

## 2. Methodology of Research Study

The research team has collected the information through primary and secondary data, comprehensive literature review, and case studies.

### Primary Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was developed for collection of primary data to add knowledge to the existing literature on impact of illiteracy on HRD in the SAARC region. The questionnaire was reviewed and approved by the research team and Director SHRDC. Before finalizing the questionnaire, it was pre-tested in Islamabad. A sample size of households [328] was selected using the technique of random sampling. Questionnaire has been annexed. Keeping in view, the education rate in the SAARC region and to facilitate the respondents, questionnaire was filled in by the enumerators. Focal persons [research facilitators] in the Member States were engaged for the purpose of primary data collection. The collected data from all the Member States was analyzed for interpretation of results using SPSS-17 and MS Excel-2010.

### Sampling Procedure

For primary data collection, a sample of households [328] was selected using the technique of random sampling. The sample size was distributed among the SAARC countries. The data/information was collected through semi structured questionnaire. Enumerators were selected and given on-line training to fill in the questionnaires. The study respondents included primary teachers, social activists, policy makers, education department officials and other educationists. Out of 328 households, distribution was made considering the percent share of primary education pupils in the SAARC Member States, as given in Table 3:

**Table 3: Number of Respondents in SAARC Member States**

Country	Number of pupils	Percent share in region	Sample size
Afghanistan	5291624	2.84	37
Bangladesh	18432500	9.89	31
Bhutan	111183	0.06	30
India	137746816	73.91	78
Maldives	40201	0.02	31
Nepal	4951956	2.66	41
Pakistan	18050718	9.69	50
Sri Lanka	1735475	0.93	30
Total	186360473	100	328

Data source: World Bank, 2015

Number of pupil shown in Table 3 is defined as “primary education pupils are the total number of pupils enrolled at primary level in public and private schools”.

### Literature Review

Research team has done comprehensive review of the articles, development plans, policy documents, research studies, research articles on illiteracy and HRD in the SAARC region. The digital library of Higher Education Commission has also been used.

## **Case Study**

The research teams have used case study approach to collect the in-depth information to analyze the reliability and validity of the research.

## **Reviews of Independent Reports**

The project teams have carried out a review of information covering all the SAARC countries. The documents reviewed were based on secondary sources, which largely comprised on published reports on the illiteracy and HRD, and national policies, programs and plans. The reports published by autonomous organizations, research institutions, academics, UNESCO, the World Bank and relevant governments documents were reviewed. The use of secondary sources such as statistical surveys, research papers, case studies and different databases were accessed for quantitative and background information.

The descriptive analysis was furnished considering the social and cultural norms of the respective countries; this will facilitate the reader choice to assess whether region is improving in their efforts for HRD. The information collected from diversified sources was evaluated through cross-analysis to determine the implementation of policies developed by different SAARC Member States.

### **3. Review of Literature on Illiteracy on HRD**

The study of Ramanamma and Baubawale [1978] contributed in parameters of illiteracy. They have critically examined dropout patterns in respect of sociological implications in the state of Maharashtra, India. The study found that sociological parameter is showing higher influence on dropouts rather than economic parameters. Moreover, the study suggested measures for the reduction of dropouts to eliminative sociological implications exist in the various socio-economic regions. The study traced out various relationships in enrolment pattern in the above mentioned aspects. The study concluded that the low community participation, schools which have showing lower performance are reported lower enrolments among institutions wise and category-wise of scheduled tribes. Moreover, the study suggested a framework suitable different areas and different scheduled tribe categories to improve the enrolment ratio at grassroots level.

Baland and Robinson [1998] presented an argument about why child labour exists and they showed that child labour can be inefficient even in a model where parents are fully altruistic towards their children because there can be a commitment problem between parents and children. If parents run out of resources to educate the child, they have to borrow against child's future income. However, a commitment problem arises because when children are adults, their parents cannot control them and children cannot credibly commit to transfer part of their [higher] income to the parents to compensate them.

Dev [2000] reported that programs like education guarantee scheme in India, food for education in Bangladesh would be useful for improvements in schooling. The establishment of compulsory education for children is a necessary condition for the reduction and abolition of child labour. In a narrow sense the compulsory education is understood as a law making it compulsory for parents to send their own children to school and allowing for the punishment of parents who do not comply with it.

Kabeer [2002] studied that lack of education and skills undermine returns to labour. Those who lack assets, education and social networks tend to be in the worst paid and most casualised segments of the labour and commodity markets, engaging in a multiplicity of intermittent, seasonal and/or poorly paid activities to survive. Older forms of vulnerability persist in South Asia, although they may have been exacerbated by some of the changes mentioned above. Economic liberalisation has been relatively slow compared with Latin America and East Asia. South Asian countries remain more or less characterised by a dual economy: the formal sector [which offers higher remuneration, better working conditions and greater social protection] constitutes a very small part of the total [only about 15percent of India's workforce in 1987-8 was made up of regular salaried employees]. Most economic activity took place in unregulated, informal sectors which straddle urban and rural areas.

The World Bank [2007] reported that South Asia's stock of human capital is still low as compared with that in other parts of the world. However, the evidence indicates continuous skill upgrading in the region over time. Trends in enrolment rates over time could answer many questions raised, but the limited availability of household surveys at different points in time for all countries in the region makes the use of enrolment rates to compare trends over time difficult. To overcome this difficulty, we use data from the most recently available survey and looked at the educational attainment of age cohorts of individuals born at different times. For example, individuals aged 50–59 years in 2000 were born in the 1940s; those aged 40–49 years were born in the 1950s, and so on. With this perspective, we can identify changes in educational investments across different generations and compare the speed at which the human capital stock was upgraded over time. As this only requires using the most recent survey, we were able to add information on additional countries in South Asia, namely, Bhutan, Maldives, and Nepal.



The World Bank's report also indicated that Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan made slower progress. During the four decades, those three countries increased the proportion of children who completed at least a primary education about 2.5-fold. India has continued to fare better than Bangladesh, which in turn has fared better than Pakistan; however, these differences are not extremely large, and may be overstated, as the data for Bangladesh and India refer to 2004, while the data for Pakistan refer to 2001, and the country's enrolment rates have increased dramatically. At this level of education, only Sri Lanka can be compared with Malaysia: both countries have the same starting and ending points, although Malaysia's progress toward universal primary education has been faster. Despite on-going progress, the speed at which the South Asian countries are currently upgrading their populations' skills will clearly not allow them to catch up quickly with other parts of the world, especially East Asia. Even though the proportion of the population with higher education was similar in China, India, and Malaysia, differences in enrolment rates suggest that the two regions are not making similar efforts in terms of the flow of human capital. South Asia is clearly lagging behind East Asia, with the implication that levels of attainment of tertiary education are likely to diverge further over time.

Khan [2007] analysed that the role of human capital for attracting the foreign direct investment. Study concluded that one major reason of slow economic growth in the South Asian nations is illiteracy, irrelevant and inadequate skills and the use of out-dated technologies. The ignoring skills are increasingly upsetting the abilities of regional countries to participate in the developing world marketplace, achieved sustainable growth and move from exports of primary goods towards export of finished goods. Study suggested that skilled and trained labour force highly attracting the foreign private investment. By analysing the relationship between FDI and human capital study proposed that if South Asian gets benefit from foreign private investment they must skilled their workers.

Kumar and Mir [2014] in their study on 'SAARC: organisation, aspects, constituency and working' reported that despite some improvements in the past decades, the literacy rates remained disappointingly low throughout the South Asia, particularly in rural areas. This high illiteracy rate weakens the family planning efforts, limit farmer's abilities to utilize technological improvements, and produce labour efficiency in the general manufacturing sector. The adult literacy rate [57.6percent] of the region is lowest in the world. South Asia is still lagging in literacy chart and is figuring very low as compared to developed countries which are about to touch the three figure mark in literacy rate. There are more children out of school in South Asia than in rest of the world and two third of this constitute female children. According to a recent United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF] study, the worst affected region for malnourished children is South Asia and half of the children in South Asia are underweight, despite the much higher Gross National Product [GNP] growth rate and a more robust increase in food production in South Asia.

South Asia probably rates one of the highest in terms of human deprivation. It is overwhelmed with poverty, illiteracy, and low life expectancy. One third of South Asians live below the poverty line and the looming climate-induced maladies may exacerbate the scenario leading to massive migration of population [Rahman, 2011].

Kingdon [2007], referring to the ASER 2006 survey, discussed the latest picture of schooling participation in India. It finds that 93.4 percent of all elementary school age children [6-14 year olds] were enrolled in school, an encouraging statistic, reflecting a good deal of progress compared to enrolments in the early 1990s. Among children 11-14 years old enrol was lower: 10.3 percent of girls and 7.7 percent of boys were out of school [either never enrolled in school or dropped out]. Among 15-16 years old, the corresponding out-of school figures rose steeply to 22.7 percent and 20.2 percent respectively for girls and boys.



The report further stated that in late 2001, the Indian Supreme Court directed all states to implement the Mid-Day Meal [MDM] Scheme by providing every child in every government and government assisted primary school with a prepared mid-day meal with a minimum content of 300 calories and 8-12 grams of protein each day of school for a minimum of 200 days. By 2006, the MDM scheme was near universal in all states, following public mobilization efforts to encourage states to act. This is a centrally funded scheme in that the central government provides grains, funds transportation and also pays food preparation costs, though the state government is responsible for providing the physical infrastructure for cooking the meals. The scheme provides lunch to about 120 million children every school day and, as such, is the largest school meal scheme in the world. Certain states have gone beyond the mandated scope of the scheme, for instance in Kerala and Tamil Nadu the destitute and the aged are allowed to take the MDM and in Gujarat the scheme covers children from Grades 1 to 7 rather than only in the primary grades [1 to 5].

**Table 4: Literacy Rates by State, Area and Gender in India**

Gender	Male [%]			Female [%]			Total Persons [%]		
	1991	2001	Increase	1991	2001	Increase	1991	2001	Increase
Andhra Pradesh	55.1	70.9	15.8	32.7	51.2	18.5	44.1	61.1	17.0
Bihar	52.5	62.2	9.7	22.9	35.2	12.3	38.5	49.2	10.7
Gujarat	73.1	76.5	3.4	48.6	55.6	7.0	61.3	66.4	5.1
Haryana	69.1	79.3	10.2	40.5	56.3	15.8	55.9	68.6	12.7
Himachal Pradesh	75.4	84.6	9.2	52.1	67.1	15.0	63.9	75.9	12.0
Karnataka	67.3	76.3	9.0	44.3	57.5	13.2	56.0	67.0	11.0
Kerala	93.6	94.2	0.6	86.1	87.9	1.8	89.8	90.9	1.1
Madhya Pradesh	58.4	77.0	18.6	28.9	51.0	22.1	44.2	64.4	20.0
Maharashtra	76.6	86.3	9.7	52.3	67.5	15.2	64.9	77.3	12.4
Orissa	63.1	76.0	12.9	34.7	51.0	16.3	49.1	63.6	14.5
Punjab	65.7	75.6	9.9	50.4	63.6	13.2	58.5	70.0	11.5
Rajasthan	55.0	76.5	21.5	20.4	44.3	23.9	38.6	61.0	22.4
Tamil Nadu	73.8	82.3	8.5	51.3	64.6	13.3	62.7	73.5	10.8
Uttar Pradesh	55.7	70.9	15.2	25.3	43.9	18.6	41.6	58.1	16.5
West Bengal	67.8	77.6	9.8	46.6	60.2	13.6	57.7	69.2	11.5
India	64.1	75.6	11.5	39.3	54.0	14.7	52.2	65.2	13.0

Source: Census 1991, census 2001 [Planning Commission, 2002a].

Note: The old boundaries of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have been used for 2001, i.e. including Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttaranchal, respectively.

Barro and Lee [2001] studied that human capital particularly that attained through education has been emphasized as a critical determinant of economic progress. A greater amount of educational attainment implied more skilled and productive workers, who in turn increase an economy's output of goods and services. An abundance of well-educated human resources also helps to facilitate the absorption of advanced technologies from developed countries. In addition, the level and distribution of educational attainment has a strong impact on social outcomes, such as child mortality, fertility, education of children, and income distribution.

Hierarchical organisation of production requires literate manpower. This is because literacy and numeracy are necessary for information to circulate within large organisations through accounting, budgeting, reporting etc. To the extent that illiterate workers cannot receive or transmit information in written form, they are less employable in large organisations. Moreover, highly educated managers and supervisors are necessary to run large organisations. An immediate implication is that specialisation

within organisations – and hence the size of hierarchies – may be limited by the education level of the labour force.

Fafchamps and Shilpi [2005] studied that hierarchical organisation of production requires educated manpower. This is because literacy and numeracy are necessary for information to circulate within large organisations through accounting, budgeting, reporting etc. To the extent that illiterate workers cannot receive or transmit information in written form, they are less employable in large organisations. Moreover, highly educated managers and supervisors are necessary to run large organisations. An immediate implication is that specialisation within organisations – and hence the size of hierarchies – may be limited by the education level of the labour force.

Psacharopoulos [1985] reported that primary schooling remains the number-one priority for investment. This is evidenced by the fact that the social rate of return to primary education exceeds by several percentage points the returns to secondary and higher education. The degree of public subsidization of higher education is such that there is considerable margin for reducing subsidy levels. This stems from the calculations that a reduction of public subsidies to higher education would drive down the private rate closer to the social rate, still leaving an attractive return to private investment. The savings from the reduction of university subsidies could be used to expand primary education. Reducing public subsidies to higher education and reallocating them to primary education would have additional benefits that can be viewed as equitable. To a great extent, universities are attended by those who can afford to pay, whereas the less well-off portion of the population would now find educational opportunities more open and accessible.

Tilak [2001] studied that once education is regarded as a critical factor for development, it has to be reflected in the pattern of allocation of resources. Particularly countries that lack the historical advantage of huge investments in education have to allocate a reasonably high proportion of national incomes [say 6 percent], and a reasonably high proportion of their government budgets [say about one-fifth to one-fourth] to education. It is repeatedly found that primary education has a significant impact on development, including a reduction in poverty and improvement in income distribution, health and nutrition, and demographic changes. But the priority accorded to primary education is inadequate in poor developing countries of South Asia. It follows that first level education and literacy need to be emphasised particularly in relatively less developed countries like the South Asian ones, where universalization of primary education is still not in place and mass illiteracy predominates.

It does not mean that developing countries have to concentrate exclusively on primary education. Such a policy prescription ignores the links between and inter-dependence of various levels of education, and evidence testifying to the links between education and economic growth. As countries develop, the threshold level of education also changes from primary to secondary education and from secondary to higher education so as to enable it to contribute significantly to the process of development. Based on the international evidence, one can say that a gross enrolment ratio of about 20 percent in higher education may be a threshold level for a country to become 'developed', as no developed country has an enrolment ratio of less than 20 percent. Probably a country with less than 20 percent enrolment ratio in higher education cannot aim at becoming an economically advanced country. A higher enrolment ratio in higher education of course means higher enrolment ratios in primary and secondary education, but the converse is not true. So countries that aim at a high economic growth should aim at high enrolments in higher education, which in turn requires rapid expansion or, in fact, universalization of quality primary and secondary education [Tilak, 2001].

The World Bank [2007] study findings indicate that the share of the population completing at least grade 5 in the South Asian countries. It depicts changes in primary school achievement across different generations ranging from those now in their 50s to those aged 15–19 at the time of the surveys. Once again, Sri Lanka is the outlier in the South Asia region: more than 70 percent of Sri Lankans born in the late 1940s had completed at least five years of education, and continuous progress during the next 40 years led to practically universal primary education.

For all the other South Asian countries, the starting point was much lower, ranging from 5 percent for Bhutan to 35 percent for India. Countries that started with the lowest educational level improved at a more rapid pace. The most spectacular changes took place in Bhutan and in the Maldives. Over a 20-year period, Bhutan moved from a situation where only a tiny proportion of children went to school to a situation where almost half of children spend at least five years in school, and the Maldives was able to increase access to primary education to practically 90 percent of children and catch up with Sri Lanka. Nepal also stands out, with a 4.5-fold increase in the proportion of children completing at least five years of schooling [The World Bank, 2007].

The report also forwarded that Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan made slower progress. During four decades, those three countries increased the proportion of children who completed at least a primary education about 2.5-fold. India has continued to fare better than Bangladesh, which in turn has fared better than Pakistan; however, these differences are not extremely large, and may be overstated, as the data for Bangladesh and India refer to 2004, while the data for Pakistan refer to 2001, and the country's enrolment rates have increased dramatically. At this level of education, only Sri Lanka can be compared with Malaysia: both countries have the same starting and ending points, although Malaysia's progress toward universal primary education has been faster [The World Bank, 2007].

The Human Capital Report [2015] published by the World Economic Forum indicated that currently, more than 200 million people globally are out of a job, with youth hit particularly hard<sup>1</sup>. Yet, a focus on unemployment rates alone provides an incomplete outlook on a nation's success in utilizing its human capital endowment. A more inclusive metric of human capital outcomes would need to take stock of all those—including youth, women and older workers—who have the desire and potential to contribute their capabilities, skills and experience for their own well-being as well as that of economy and society as a whole. Such a metric would also need to assess the education and skills of both the active and inactive population. Above all, as today's economies become ever more knowledge-based, technology-driven and globalized, and because we simply don't know what the jobs of tomorrow will look like, there is a growing recognition that we have to prepare the next generation with the capacity for lifelong learning<sup>2</sup>.

The Human Capital Index seeks to serve as a tool for capturing the complexity of education and workforce dynamics so that various stakeholders are able to take better-informed decisions. Because human capital is critical not only to the productivity of society but also the functioning of its political, social and civic institutions, understanding its current state and capacity is valuable to a wide variety of stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup>World Economic Forum [2015] “Disrupting Unemployment: Business-led Solutions for Action”, [www.reports.weforum.org/disrupting-unemployment](http://www.reports.weforum.org/disrupting-unemployment); and [www.ilo.org/inform/online-information-resources/research-guides/youth-employment/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/inform/online-information-resources/research-guides/youth-employment/lang--en/index.htm) [accessed April 2015].

<sup>2</sup>Acemoglu, D. and D. Autor, “What Does Human Capital Do? A Review of Goldin and Katz's “The Race Between Education and Technology”, NBER Working Paper 17820, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2012, [www.nber.org/papers/w17820](http://www.nber.org/papers/w17820).

**Table 5: Human Capital Index- 2015**

SAARC	Overall index 2015		Under 15 years age group	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
Afghanistan	--	--	--	--
Bangladesh	57.62	99	74.98	89
Bhutan	61.11	87	79.59	74
India	57.62	100	82.03	67
Maldives	--	--	--	--
Nepal	55.77	106	82.03	83
Pakistan	52.63	113	60.52	115
Sri Lanka	68.19	60	87.32	43

Source: World Economic Forum, 2015

Dev [2014] studied that labour force participation rates among youth have been declining in all the regions which is a reflection of improved enrolment of education. East Asia's labour force participation rate which was 66.3 percent in 2000 declined to 55.1 percent in 2012. The decline has been slower in South East Asia and Pacific sub-region decline from 56.4 percent to 52.4 percent. South Asia has the lowest work participation rate and declined from 47.8 percent to 39.6 percent during the same period. Lack of education and skills for youth workers are the major problems in developing economies of Asia and Pacific for unemployment, joblessness, employability problems and low wages. Youth population often reach working age without education and basic skills which are important for employment prospects.

The challenges for young workers particularly for developing economies like South Asia are: unemployment, high share in informal sector, underemployment, working poor, low paid jobs, low working conditions, lack of structural transformation to industry and services, lack of education, skills and training. Unemployment is the result of the combined effect of [a] mismatch between the skills level of jobseekers and the skills demanded by enterprises; [b] the supply of workers seeking a job exceeds the demand of enterprises/vacancies available; and [c] imperfect information on the jobs available, skills mismatches or low demand for workers – induce a process of de-motivation and, as a result, individuals reduce their job search activity thus decreasing the probability of getting jobs. Workers particularly informal sector workers have two sets of problems. The first one is the capability deprivation in terms of inadequate employment, low earnings, low health and educational status which are related to general deprivation of poorer sections of the population. The second one is adversity in the sense of absence of adequate fall back mechanisms to meet contingencies such as ill health, accident, death, and old age. As many youth are in the informal sector and working poor, social protective measures are required to take care of their problems [Dev, 2014].

Fricke and Thornton [1987] found that education is primarily a function of socialization within the family in this type of social organization. Where institutional education coexists with the familial mode of organization [often in the form of religious institutions], there are often severe constraints on the extent to which it is open to all strata of society. Education thus becomes an explicit family strategy, often competing with and subordinate to the needs of family production. Consequently the educational attainments of children are limited certainly by the standards of societies with well-developed school systems for large fractions of the population.

Barai [2014] reported that South Asia is both the most populous and most densely populated geographical region in the world. Poverty is also rampant, so is illiteracy. There are, for example, more illiterate women in India than in the entire continent of Africa. Moreover, the women population seem to have remained at the furthest end of poverty margin in all the countries. However, the deadly combination of over-population and poverty could be the breeding ground for many of the social evils. Along with different intervention measures, education could serve as a weapon to fight poverty. Unfortunately, South Asia lacks that educational infrastructure too. A look on Malaysian approach to economic development at the initial phase reveals that it wanted to impart vocational education to its pupil first for making them productive. In South Asia, higher education seems to have grown disproportionately than mass vocational and technical education.

Barai also added that the vision of a South Asian to send poverty in museum through economic progress has raised hope of empowerment of marginalized people in the region and beyond. A process of gradual democratization and people's yearn for more democratic governance side by side the growth of a middle class signaling the change South Asia. With the changing political scenario, some people are willing to break free of the barriers set by the states and transform the economic landscape of South Asia. These developments could be directed to further the betterment of people if the counties of the region can offer application oriented vocational education to a broad segment of people to help them join the production process and become more productive.

Dreze and Sen [2012] wrote in monthly Yojana that almost any composite index of indicators: health, education and nutrition would place India very close to the bottom in a ranking of all countries outside Africa. Growth, of course, can be very helpful in achieving development, but this requires active public policies to ensure that the fruits of economic growth are widely shared, and also requires making good use of the public revenue generated by fast economic growth for social services, especially for public health care and public education. They emphasized that the power of comprehensiveness in social policy is evident not only from international and historical experience, but also from contemporary experience in India itself. In at least three Indian states, universal provision of essential services has become an accepted norm. Kerala has a long history of comprehensive social policies, particularly in the field of elementary education – the principle of universal education at public expense was an explicit objective of state policy in Travancore as early as 1817. Early universalization of elementary education is the cornerstone of Kerala's wide ranging social achievements.

Amriullah [2014] analysed that South Asia is one of the most backward regions with most populous, highest density, massive poverty, unbalanced growth and weak economy. Many people suffers from malnutrition, hunger, illiteracy, gender imbalance, unbalanced regional growth and are in need of basic healthcare, education, drinking water, food and sanitation. These challenges will be exacerbated by climate and environmental challenges. There is shortage of both physical as well as social infrastructure in comparison to explosive population growth of the region that is going to be crucial in coming decades. It is estimated that India is going to top the population list by 2050 according to UN and the World Bank and Pakistan and Bangladesh are also in this race. The government has not invested too much to bridge the gap of infrastructure deficit due to budgetary shortage and technical know-how. The private sector investment has also been limited because of government sectors monopoly, political instability, wars, public protests against private projects and other calamities both natural as well as man-made. In the early 1990's, there were not many countries that worked with the private sector.

Barro and Lee [2010] studied that developing countries have successfully reduced illiteracy rates, especially among the younger cohorts. Specifically, the proportion of the uneducated in the total



population over age 15 in developing countries has declined significantly over the past six decades since 1950, from 64.9percent in 1950 to 20.1percent in 2010. Among 15–24 year olds, this proportion has declined from 47.1percent in 1950 to 7.1percent in 2010.

Nabi [2010] studied that poor education outcomes give rise to other reasons to worry about sustaining Asia's growth. South Asia's gross education enrolment rates, average years of schooling, indicators of trainability of workers to enhance economy-wide productivity and international competitiveness are considerably lower than the East Asian countries [Sri Lanka being an exception]. On infrastructure comparisons [for example, in electric power consumption per capita and container traffic], another driver of international competitiveness, South Asia fared a lot poorer than East Asia. These, in part, not only explain the much lower share of trade to GDP ratio in South Asia compared to East Asia, but also highlight the much smaller proportion of high technology products in South Asia's merchandize exports compared to East Asia's.

Dhar and Samanta [2014] studied that in order to benefit from the demographic changes that are afoot in the region, South Asia needs to accord priority to building its human capital base. This factor becomes even more imperative with skill intensive services emerging as the drivers of the economies in the region. Countries in South Asia would, therefore, have to shift their priorities in the education sector, and have to go beyond the primary education, which has been the focus of their policy in this sector. In other words, these countries would have to invest in secondary and tertiary sectors, including vocationalization, in order to bring the workforce in sync with the requirements of the sectors that are driving the growth of their economies. The considerable increase in tertiary school enrolment ratio across the countries of South Asia reflects the increase in demand for tertiary education due to services growth and wage level. Investment in tertiary education also depends on opportunities of migration to developed countries. Sri Lanka with highest skilled migration rates show highest tertiary school enrolment ratio. In anticipation to migrate, the increase in tertiary school enrolment can be complementary to services growth.

UNICEF [2011] reported that throughout the push for universal primary education, categories of children who are most likely to be excluded from education in South Asia have been generated. Some of these categories are related with 'demand' factors inherent to the children. Others are linked to 'supply' factors related to the education system, while several relate to both supply and demand. Report forwarded that children are more likely to be excluded from education if they are girls and children:

- from marginalized ethnic or caste communities
- whose first language is different from that used in school
- from socially excluded groups
- without birth registration, which means they are not always deemed to be entitled to a place at school
- whose parents have not received education
- with disabilities or special learning needs
- who are above the average age for their class
- from very poor families who cannot afford the costs of education or the opportunity costs it would entail
- who are chronically ill or malnourished
- with inadequate care and protection - orphans or children living with one or no parents
- working children
- from socially excluded families such as sex workers and HIV/AIDS infected.

Other categories are determined by where the children live:

- in very remote areas
- in slums, often part of illegally settled groups
- in refugee camps who have been displaced
- as migrant workers.

Some children face temporary periods of exclusion from school, the repercussions of which can often lead to permanent dropout. They include the children:

- in countries which experience conflict or emergencies when children recruited as child soldiers, forced into early marriage, or are away from school for long periods of time
- whose parents seasonally migrate for work.

Different countries in the South Asian region have different patterns of exclusion. For example India and Bangladesh are both facing a vast increase in urbanization which means that increasing numbers of out-of-school children are to be found in cities, while in Afghanistan and Bhutan the majority of children who have unequal access to education are in rural districts. It is important that policy makers and planners move away from lists of assumed categories of excluded children and carry out in-depth, country-specific analyses on the actual situation within their own particular country context. This is particularly important considering that the majority of children who are excluded from school experience multiple deprivations.

Balasinorwala et al. [2012] presented that the present formal education system across the South Asian region does not emphasise or even acknowledge the value of local natural resources, culture and traditional knowledge. This results in disconnect between the youth which are the product of this education system and the village and its life. Little traditional knowledge passes on to the newer generation and their interactions with the surrounding environment end up becoming indifferent or negative. The youth often find local values irrelevant in the face of changing socio-economic scenarios and severe livelihood pressures.

Fayyaz [2014] studied that South Asian nations are low- and middle-income economies. Conflicts emerging after the subcontinent's partition and resulting mistrust have proved stumbling blocks in the region's development. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation [SAARC] was established in 1985 with an agenda to promote a cooperative approach for the solution of the region's problems. The SAARC has become a well-established regional bureaucracy with regular meetings comprised of top leaders and those at working levels. Tangible results, however, have been very limited. The region struggles with many challenges, from infrastructure development to law and order. It faces widespread poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and a lack of proper health and education infrastructure. The SAARC has not been able to implement its vision for improvement thus far.

Harmonizing workforce development in South Asia is not without serious challenges. The main question is how Pakistan and India will be able to sustain cooperation. The SAARC platform could have been a tool to implement the initiative region-wide. Pakistan and India, however, have not been able to utilize the SAARC to mitigate their differences. They prefer bilateral engagement; however, they have not been able to sustain engagements. The composite dialogue was a comprehensive framework covering resolution of outstanding disputes as well as promotion of confidence building measures. The process could not sustain itself in the face of difficult situations. The challenge, therefore, lies in sustaining

engagement when employing a development model. When the issue is assessed, it presents itself primarily in two frames:

**Table 6: Domestic and Bilateral Challenges**

Domestic	Bilateral
Overpopulation	Low trust levels
Poverty	Inward looking approach
Illiteracy	Lack of political will to resolve outstanding issues
Unemployment	Overwhelming internal problems
Underdeveloped educational infrastructure	No sharing of information and know-how
Lack of competitiveness	Limited Comparative Advantage
Low priority on human and material resource development	Protectionist economic policies
Weak governance systems	Poor regional connectivity and movement
Law & order issues	Lack of collaboration in tackling security issues
Insurgencies & terrorism	Low priority on building support for collaboration
Hostile public opinion	No serious effort to build public opinion in favor of engagement

Song et al. [2014] studied parental, familial and community support interventions to improve children's literacy in developing countries: a systematic review and found that the most proximal contexts [i.e., a child's home and community] have a direct influence on literacy development. Numerous initiatives are underway globally to try to improve children's literacy development, including interventions that work through parents, families, and communities. These initiatives are intended to supplement children's school-based learning or provide alternatives for children who do not have access to pre-primary or primary education. Examples of such interventions include tutoring and peer-assisted learning, mobile libraries, programs to build parental knowledge on how to support children's literacy, literacy instruction outside regular schools [e.g., in the context of religious education], and the provision of educational media for use outside regular classroom instruction.



## 4. Situation Analysis of Illiteracy in the SAARC Region

The non-formal education [NFE] has been a key strategy for all countries in the SAARC region to provide educational opportunities to youth and adults, especially illiterates, who are outside the formal education stream. The NFE programs are varied in nature, duration, content and type. Most countries have established two or more of the four types of non-formal education program: a] literacy and post-literacy classes; b] out of school or functional literacy or cooperative or entrepreneurship education classes; c] vocational training; and d] life skills and livelihood development activities including community learning centers. The following section presents the situation of illiteracy and its trend in each SAARC country, which is a barrier for human capability development and life-long learning:

### Afghanistan

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world [13th least developed on the HDI, life expectancy is 49 years for both sexes and highest fertility rates with 6 births per woman]. It has a population of 30.5 million with a very young population i.e. 50 percent under the age of 15, and 36 percent of the population are at school age [UNFPA, 2013]. About 1.2 million children are classified as child laborers who are out of school.

With a global commitment for the EFA and MDGs in 2000 more than 7 million children during 2001 to 2013 [from 1 million to 8 million] are enrolled with the establishment of 12,000 new general schools, 39 percent of them are girls. The number of teachers has also significantly increased from 110,000 in 2007 to around 187,000 in 2013 of which 32 percent are females. Similarly number of secondary graduates has risen from about 10,000 in 2001 to more than 266,000 in 2013. Enrolment at higher education institutions has risen from less than 8,000 in 2001 to more than 132,000 in 2013.

The social and economic fabric of the country is marred by decades of war and conflict. Poverty is widespread as 36.5 percent of Afghans are not able to meet their basic needs. The official unemployment rate is low and stands at 8.2 percent, but most employed people [77 percent] have insecure jobs with low salaries, especially women, who are less likely to be employed and have lower salaries.

As 'education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan' [Article 22 of the Constitution], significant improvements have been seen in youth literacy where female literacy has gone up from 29 percent in 2005 to 48 percent in 2012 and male literacy from 43 percent in 2005 to 64 percent in 2012. The gender parity index for youth literacy has improved from 0.45 in 2007-08 to 0.52 in 2011-12. The estimated years of schooling for all increased from 2.5 to 8.1 during the last ten years. The social benefits, however, has been unequal. The youth literacy rate is only 39 percent, compared to 71 percent in urban areas. The women of Afghanistan [48.9 percent of population] are grappling with the worst of challenges in the world and their current situation presents a serious challenge to human development. The following table shows the youth literacy urban-rural gaps as well as disparity between male and female

**Table 7: Youth Literacy Urban-Rural Gaps**

Gender/percent	Urban	Rural	Kuchi/migrant	National
Male	68.7	39.1	13.2	45.4
Female	37.9	10.4	1.2	31.4
Total	53.5	25.0	7.2	31.4

Source: National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2012

The adult literacy rate was 45 percent for men and 17 percent for women. The literacy rate is dramatically different for the rural and urban populations, the rural adult literacy rate less than half of urban adult literacy rate for both males and females. Much of this difference can be contributed to less school access available in rural compared to urban areas. The number of literacy students increased more than 14 times from 55,373 [Female: 15, 821] in 2002 to 787,709 [Female 332,154] in 2013. These levels of literacy have been improved over recent years as it was at 26 percent, NRVA 2008. At least 11 million Afghans age 15 and above suffering from literacy inequalities.

It is more difficult to obtain a sense of how literacy rates have changed over time. The NRVA 2011 attempts to get at this issue by examining the declared literacy levels of different age groups, thus showing whether younger age groups may have benefited from greater literacy learning and thus demonstrate higher percentages of literacy competence. The statistics for youth literacy [15-24 years] confirm this trend, with younger females manifesting a literacy rate almost double that of the total [15+] female literacy rate [NRVA, 2013]:

**Table 8: Male- Female Literacy**

Age/percent	Male	Female	Total
Youth [15-24]	61.9	32.1	47.0
Adult [15+]	45.4	17.0	31.4

Source: National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2012

There is need to ensure the sustainability of literacy skills beyond the initial training. Courses should be connected with specific vocational and life skills in order to provide greater practical application for the literacy skills being developed. Commitments to literacy should be explicitly included in the National Priority Programs [NPP], by including adult literacy in NPP-2, EFA and increasing the scope of occupational literacy in NPP-1 sustainable decent work. The National Literacy Action Plan 2012-2015 [NLAP] estimates that total fund requirement would be at least US\$ 300 million to provide comprehensive literacy combined with vocational training to 2.1 million adults. Financing of NLAP would be from government core funding, grant support from donors, resource support from the corporate sector and community contributions.

Adult literacy needs to be seen in a wider context with opportunities both for literacy embedded with life skills and other skills necessary to improve living conditions, and as a pathway to further education and lifelong learning. To address weak leadership a clear strategic direction must be articulated so that stakeholders share complementary goals and maximize collaboration. Literacy provision must focus on women; both learners and facilitators, with relevant content and support such as child care arrangements.

The relevance of the education including of NFE can be improved through more consultations with the direct beneficiaries, i.e. students and learners, as well as the indirect beneficiaries like potential employers, families and community. Curriculum reform both in formal and non-formal education can include relevant and useable knowledge that will attract and motivate learners of all ages. This can be further defined in the proposed Afghan National Qualifications Framework [ANQF].

## Bangladesh

The People's Republic of Bangladesh - with 153.6 million people living in an area of 145,570 sq. km [BBS, 2011] - is one of the most densely populated countries of the world with 78 percent people live in

rural areas. Bangladesh economy has recorded an annual growth rate of around 6 percent in the last decade despite global economic turmoil in recent years. The incidence of poverty has fallen from 48.9 percent in 2000 to 31.5 percent in 2010. Poverty reduction has been faster in cities compared to rural areas. In spite of many internal and external shocks [such as cyclones, floods and conflicts in countries where Bangladeshi workers find employment], per capita income has risen to USD 1,044 by 2013 with steady progress achieved in lowering poverty.

Bangladesh has made significant strides in different indicators of human development. In addition to expanding access to basic education, gender parity has been achieved in enrolment at both primary and secondary levels. Life expectancy has risen to 67.7 years in 2011. The country is poised to enjoy a 'demographic dividend' with a decreasing dependency of non-working to working age population with an increment of 3.3 percent per year.

The national education goals recognize the link between education and development by emphasizing universal primary education and the literacy level of the population. This is critical for enhancing life skills and preparation for the world of work. The HRD priority is reflected in the effort to expand access to education for all. Significant strides have been made towards these goals. Net primary school enrolment rate is 97.3 percent for 2013 [DPE, 2014]. The literacy rate among the adult population was 59.8 percent in 2010 compared to 35.3 percent in 1991 and 47.8 percent in 2001.

**Table 9: Adult Literacy [15+ years] Rates by Sex**

Gender	1981* [%]	1991*[%]	2001*[%]	2010**[%]
Female [15+ yrs]	17.97	25.84	41.40	55.71
Male [15+]	39.97	44.31	54.00	63.80
Total [15+]	29.23	35.33	47.80	59.82

Source: \*UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2012 [for years 1981, 1991 and 2001]

\*\*BBS Bangladesh Literacy Survey 2010

The adult literacy rate has been rising mainly due to the expansion of primary education. Despite these achievements significant gender and urban-rural disparities in adult literacy persist. The 2011 assessment of the 15-45 age-range also showed an urban rural gap of over 16 percentage points – 47.9 percent for rural and 64.3 percent for urban. The NFE interventions are focused mainly on basic literacy skills assuming that acquisition of literacy would progressively lead to its application and socio-economic gains. Experience suggested that the participants, whose livelihood was primarily related to subsistence farming, often relapsed into illiteracy. It was considered necessary to link literacy activities directly with skills development aiming at sustainable socio-economic development of the learners.

Over 5,000 Community Learning Centers [CLC] have been run for 10 years or longer by well-established NGOs including BRAC. The NGO-run Community Learning Centers, with some differences among them, offer a menu of skill development opportunities, which include locally, identified life and livelihood skills and functional literacy giving priority to youth and women. Some have emphasized ICT skills and the use of ICT as a source of relevant information and knowledge for the participants [Vollman, 2014].

A project to launch a literacy initiative to serve 4.5 million people in the age-group 15-45 years approved in February, 2014 by the government with a budget of TK 4,526 million. To achieve its intended outcomes, concerns about proper assessment of learning and its effective management linking it to permanent community learning centers to be addressed.

For delivering NFE and promoting lifelong learning including functional and sustainable literacy, a number of actions demand at policy and implementation level. They include to: i] facilitate dialogue between government policy makers and development partners on a literacy approach focused on sustained adult learning within a lifelong learning framework; ii] find ways to establish permanent CLCs and resource centers to back up the thereby creating sustainable NFE structures at the grassroots with local government involvement, and public budgetary allocations complemented by other resources; and iii] develop a long-term approach towards capacity development on NFE in order to effectively perform its multi-faceted role of policy articulation, oversight and facilitation.

A nationwide network of community learning centers under local government auspices with active involvement of NGOs and community organizations could be the vehicle for lifelong learning, complementing formal education. Promoting functional skills and meeting genuine learning needs on a sustainable basis could be the aim, and programs designed and objectives defined accordingly [Ahmed, 2013].

## Bhutan

Bhutan's HDI value for 2013 is 0.584 – which is in the medium human development category—positioning the country at 136 out of 187 countries and territories. Between 2010 and 2013, Bhutan HDI value increased from 0.569 to 0.584, an increase of 2.7 percent or an average annual increase of about 0.88 percent. The following table reviews Bhutan's progress in each of the HDI indicators between 1980 and 2013 [UNDP, HDRs of various years]:

**Table 10: HDI of Bhutan since 1980s**

Year/HDI	Life expectancy	Years of schooling	GNI [2011 PPP\$]	HDI Value
1980	45.0	4	1,065	--
1990	52.5	4	2,575	--
2000	60.3	7.6	3,597	--
2010	67.0	12.0	6,158	0.569
2013	68.3	12.4	6,775	0.584

Source: UNDP, 2014

Bhutan's life expectancy at birth increased by 23.3 years, mean years of schooling stayed the same and expected years of schooling increased by 8.4 years. Bhutan's GNI per capita has increased by 536.2 percent during 1980 and 2013. Bhutan's 2013 HDI [0.584] is below the average of 0.614 for countries in the medium human development group and below the average of 0.588 for countries in South Asia.

Modern education began to develop in Bhutan in 1961, with the country's First Five-Year Plan. Despite this late start, Bhutan has made impressive progress in gender parity in access to education. For example, in 1970 for every 100 boys enrolled in primary school, only 2 girls were enrolled but by 2013, for every 100 boys, 101 girls were enrolled in primary school. There are more girls than boys, even at the secondary level [classes 7–10], with a GPI of 1.08, or 108 girls for every 100 boys. In less than 50 years, Bhutan has achieved gender parity in access to basic education [i.e., preprimary through class 10].

The general literacy rate among the population, 6 years and above is about 63 percent. As might be expected, literacy is higher in the urban areas and among males. General urban literacy is about 79 percent, while literacy in the rural areas is about 56 percent. Across all ages, 72 percent of males, but only

55 percent of females, are literate. Literacy rates are higher among the younger age groups, begin to drop from the 10–14 age groups, and are lowest for the older group of 55 years and above. The youth [15–24 years] literacy rate is 86 percent and adult [15 years and above] literacy is 55 percent. Over half of the population [54 percent] is literate in both a local language and English, while 8 percent is literate in only local language.

More than half of the population aged 6 years and above [55 percent] has had no education. 18 percent has reached grades 1–8, and 20 percent, grades 9–12. Only 6 percent has gone beyond grade 12. Educational attainment tends to be higher in the urban areas than in the rural areas. There are also marked differences in educational attainment between females and males. 63 percent of females have had no education, compared with 47 percent of males, and only 4 percent of females have education beyond grade 12, compared with 9 percent of males. 6 out of 10 household heads have had no formal schooling; the proportion in the rural areas [76 percent] is more than double the proportion in the urban areas [30 percent].

Among children 3 years and above, 54 percent and 29 percent in rural areas and urban areas respectively have never attended a formal school. Gender disparities are evident in school attendance. About 60 percent of males are either currently attending school or have attended in the past, compared with only about 48 percent females. Almost all students up to the secondary level are studying in Bhutan. Over a quarter of the students [28 percent] at the certificate and diploma level, and almost half [45 percent] at the bachelor's degree or higher level studies abroad.

Most of the students [94 percent] attend public schools. But at the higher secondary level, there is a big jump in the proportion of students attending private schools, compared with lower educational levels. Four out of ten higher secondary students go to private schools. Almost one-fourth of all students [22 percent], 28 percent in the rural areas, and 10 percent in the urban areas, reside in boarding facilities. Two-thirds of all students walk to school, while only 5 percent use public transport and another 5 percent use the family vehicle.

Among the population 6 years and older who never attended formal school, three out of four [76 percent] have never received any other type of learning, while one out of four have attended non-formal basic literacy or post-literacy training and have received traditional learning, or are self-taught.

In Bhutan, education has been considered as an important part of the religious life where community schools are used for adult literacy and other non-formal educational programs. The education system includes formal, non-formal, and monastic schools. The concept of community participation has also extended to the Non-Formal Education [NFE] program. All NFE centers are managed by the NFE committee consisting of the school head teachers and village elders who are directly responsible for planning and management of literacy programs in the community. In 2010, there were over 690 NFE centers in the country. The non-formal centers provide basic literacy skills for all ages. Basic literacy courses [12 months of 2-hour evening classes] under non-formal education system in Bhutan are offered to those persons, who could not attend general education courses in formal setting,

The working-age population is estimated at 413,613— about 3 in 10 persons [31 percent] in the urban areas and about 7 in 10 [69 percent] in the rural areas. Therefore, more of the working-age group can be found in the rural areas. Labor force participation is estimated at 59 percent for the country, 63 percent in the rural areas, and 52 percent in the urban areas. Gender disparities in labor force participation [70 percent for males, 50 percent for females] are greater than urban–rural disparities.



A high proportion of the labor force is employed. The country unemployment rate is estimated at 2.7 percent. In the urban areas, the unemployment rate is 5.8 percent, compared with 1.6 percent in the rural areas. Unemployment is concentrated in the younger working-age groups. It is the highest among those in the youngest working-age group, 15–24 years, who endure about five times as much unemployment as those in the 25–34 age groups. Older age groups have unemployment rates below 1 percent.

About 64 percent of the working-age population has had no schooling. The proportion of employment increases and economic inactivity decreases with educational attainment. Among those who have gone no further than the primary or secondary level, about 70 percent are employed while about a quarter are economically inactive. The proportion of those employed is the largest [86 percent] among those with the highest educational attainment, beyond the secondary level, and the proportion of the economically inactive population [7 percent] is the lowest.

Unpaid family workers make up the largest proportion of the employed, at 44 percent. Of the employed, about a quarter [26 percent] is regular paid employees and 17 percent are own-account workers. In the urban areas, most of the employed [66 percent] are regular paid employees; in the rural areas, most of the employed [57 percent] are unpaid family workers.

## India

India is the largest democracy in the world with a population of 1.21 billion [India, 2011 Census]. Indian population increased from 1.028 billion [532.2 million males and 496.5 million females] in 2001 to 1.21 billion [623.7 million males and 586.5 million females] in 2011, decadal growth rate was 17.6 percent [17.2 percent for males and 18.1 percent for females] compared to 21.5 percent during 1991-2001.

India is a vast country comprising 29 States and seven Union Territories [UTs] with diverse socio-cultural contexts and widely varying geographical and climatic conditions. Under a federal structure, the Centre and the States share the responsibilities for the planning and implementation of national development programs. The Constitution was amended in 1976 making education from a State subject to a concurrent one, which implies that, there is a shared responsibility of the Central and State Governments. As envisaged in the National Education Policy of 1986 [revised in 1992], development of education is pursued as a 'meaningful partnership between the Centre and the States'. Besides, State/UT Governments also plan and implement programs of education development keeping in view State/UT-specific situations and needs.

The developmental programs in India are guided by the Five-Year National Development Plans. The current 12th five-year plan [2012-17] envisions to have 'Faster, Sustainable, and More Inclusive Growth' in India to bring the economy back to rapid growth with literate people and trained human resources.

The National Literacy Mission [NLM] launched in 1988 provided an added impetus to the adult education movement in India. During the period 1988 to 2008, 127.45 million persons were made literate through NLM interventions. The NLM was recast in 2009 and its new variant the Saakshar Bharat [Literate India] Mission was launched in September 2009 with a renewed focus on female literacy. The Mission sought to impart functional literacy to 70 million adults [60 million females] in the age group of 15 years and above.

India has made considerable progress in improving literacy rate among population aged 7 and more during the period 2001-2011. This literacy rate increased from 64.8 percent in 2001 to 72.9 percent in

2011. During the period 2001 to 2011, a total of 202.75 million persons [98.11 male and 104.64 female] were made literate. The adult literacy rate has also shown an upward trend. During the period 2001 to 2011, the adult literacy rate has increased from 61 percent in 2001 to 69.3 percent in 2011. This increase in literacy rate has been higher for females [11.5 percent points] than that for males [5.4 percent points]. Despite an impressive increase in adult literacy rate during the period 2001-2011, wide regional differentials in adult literacy levels persist.

There has also been impressive progress towards bridging gender gap in enrolment and retention in elementary education. Between 2000-01 and 2013-14, the enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment in primary education has increased from 43.8 percent to 48.2 percent, while the enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment in upper primary education increased from 40.9 percent to 48.6 percent. The enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment in Classes IX-XII [secondary and higher secondary education] increased from 38.8 percent in 2000-01 to 47.1 percent in 2013-14. The Gender Parity Index [GPI] for GER in primary education improved from 0.82 in 2000- 01 to 1.03 in 2013-14, while the GPI for GER in upper primary education improved from 0.75 to 1.08 during this period. The GPI for GER in secondary education improved from 0.79 in 2004-05 to 1.0 in 2013-14 while the GPI for GER in higher secondary education improved from 0.80 to 0.98 during this period. The GPI for adult literacy rate improved from 0.65 in 2001 to 0.75 in 2011 while the GPI for youth literacy rate improved from 0.81 to 0.91 during the same period.

Universalization of secondary education is viewed as a priority task in the context of the efforts to enable young people to acquire the knowledge and skills that are required to enter in the world of work or for further education. Between 2000-01 and 2013-14, the enrolment in secondary/higher Secondary education has increased from 27.6 million to 59.6 million; the GER in secondary education increased from 51.7 percent to 76.6 percent while the GER in higher secondary education increased from 27.8 percent in to 52.2 percent.

The Saakshar Bharat Mission envisions a “fully literate society through improved quality and standard of adult education and literacy”. The main goals of the Mission, to be achieved by 2017, are: [i] raising literacy levels to 80 percent [from 73 percent in 2011], reducing gender gap in literacy rate to 10 percentage points [from over 16 percentage points in 2011], and [iii] bridging urban-rural and social group disparities in literacy level. Up to March 2014, the Saakshar Bharat programme was in operation in 383 out of 410 targeted districts of 25 States [Andhra Pradesh combined] and one UT. About 154,000 Adult Education Centers [AECs] have been set up, 96.2 million learners have been identified in the survey and 24.7 million participants [including 17.8 million women, 5.72 million SCs, 1.17 million STs and 2.02 million minorities] have been certified as literate by National Institute for Open Schooling [NIOS].

Under the National Skill Development Policy 2009, the government targets for skill training of 500 million people by the year 2022. Out of this target, about 50 million people are expected to be skilled through programs within the education sector. During the year 2013-14, a total of 955,000 people were covered under vocational education and skilling programs. The National Skill Qualification Framework [NSQF] was notified in December 2013 by the National Skill Development Authority which sets standards for non-formal literate people to certify their academic achievement made through non-formal and informal education.

In line with the constitutional provision for rights to education and various policies, India has adapted the following approaches and priorities to education development, often referred to as 4Es: Expansion, Equity and Inclusion, Excellence and Employability.

Expansion strategy is focused on making educational facilities and learning opportunities available for and accessible to all children, young people and adults. Expansion involves establishing educational facilities in under-served or un-served locations in order to ensure that all children, young people and adults, especially those children in rural and remote areas, have access to education as well as to relevant vocational education and training programs.

The focus of equity/inclusion is on bridging the gender and social category gaps in participation in education as the right of every citizen. This approach helps to meet the learning needs of diverse groups of pupils and provide opportunities for all learners to become successful in their learning experiences.

Achieving excellence by improving the quality and relevance of education and enabling all children and young people to achieve expected/specified learning outcomes remains a key goal of education sector development programs in India.

The government accords high priority to the task of enhancing employability of the products of the education system. Specific measures for enhancing employability include renewed focus on vocational education and making secondary education more job-relevant through skills training within the schools, equipping secondary schools with teachers/trainers who have technical skills and with facilities that are required to impart technical and vocational skills.

## **Maldives**

The Maldives consists of an archipelago of nearly 1,200 islands and a population of about 374,000 inhabitants: 300,000 Maldivians and 74,000 expatriate workers. More than 25 percent of the population lives in Male', the capital while the rest is distributed among just under 200 other inhabited islands. The Maldives had attained a gross national income [GNI] per capita of US\$ 5,790 in 2010. The country ranks 109th in the HDI for 2011. The Maldives is seeking to accelerate human development and promote economic prosperity. The development of human capital is central to the country's strategy to achieve this goal.

The life expectancy at birth is 72.83 years for men and 74.8 years for women. For the period 2001 to 2011, enrolment of both boys and girls has been maintained at close to universal level, at the primary stage and has increased substantially at the secondary level as well. There has been continuous expansion in the access to education and the building up of human capital in the Maldives. One of the earliest attempts to achieve equitable access to education in the Maldives was through the formalization of the education system by establishing a unified education system, to promote more equitable distribution of facilities. The Maldives achieved universal primary education in the year 2000, when primary education was made available on every inhabited island. The net enrolment rate at lower secondary education is 83.6 percent, 81 percent for boys and 87 percent for girls.

Like the rest of South Asia, Maldivians consider the pursuit of vocational training and skills as being inferior to pursuing academic degrees, because white-collar jobs are preferred by the general population. Due to this behaviour, the demand for vocational subjects in colleges and institutes is lower than for academic subjects. The development of soft skills, especially in schools, through a variety of activities like co-curricular and extra-curricular is also essential for employment.

The Maldives is a success story in the attainment of adult literacy. The literacy rate for the country is 94 percent. A literate population produces a broad array of economic and social benefits, and is of central importance for development [UNDP, 2010], World Bank [2011]]. The Maldives is one of the best



performing countries among developing nations, with an adult literacy rate well above the expected value for its level of per capita income. The Maldives has the highest adult literacy rate in South Asia.

The overall net primary enrolment rate, 96 percent, is high. There is also high gender parity, with the net primary enrollment for boys at 95 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate for girls at 96 percent. The gross primary enrollment rates are also high for boys at 107 percent, and girls at 104 percent. The gap between the gross and net primary enrollment rates are relatively small, suggesting low repetition in the primary education grades. The Maldives has a policy of automatic promotion through primary education, which partly explains the small difference between the gross and net primary enrolment rates.

The government invests in people through providing equal opportunity for education, lifelong learning, skills training and talent development. In the Maldives, youth is defined as young people between 18 and 35 years old. Youth makes up more than one third of the Maldivian population [33.7 percent]. The age structure of the population represents both a wealth and a challenge for the Maldives and has important implications in terms of social services delivery, employment, urbanization and other development issues.

Youth unemployment and the associated social alienation are major concerns for the Maldivian society. About 40 percent of the young women and over 20 percent of the young men are unemployed, not only because they lack the skills required in the labour market but also because of limited job opportunities and the scarcity of “attractive” jobs, especially in the Atolls. Prompt and innovative measures need to be taken to provide employment and further educational opportunities for young people. Emphasis needs to be put on self-employment and creating an entrepreneurial culture among youth as many capable young.

## Nepal

Nepal is a land-linked country located between China on the North and India on the East, South and West with 26.5 million people. Nepal is a mosaic of social diversities with more than 125 caste/ethnic, 123 languages and 10 religious groups. Having 0.54 HDI value, Nepal is ranked [157/187] as low human development countries with 69.1 years of life expectancy and 3.2 years of schooling. The overall literacy rate [for population aged 5 years and above] has increased from 54.1 percent in 2001 to 65.9 percent in 2011. Male literacy rate is 75.1 percent compared to female literacy rate of 57.4 percent. The highest literacy rate is reported in Kathmandu district with 86.3 percent and lowest in Rautahat with 41.7 percent [CBS, 2012]. Similarly, the overall literacy rate for 5 years and above has increased by 2.7 percent points from 2008 to 2011. Similarly, adult literacy for 15 years and above also has increased only by 4 percent point. Overall literacy rate ranges from the lowest 41.7 percent in Rautahat to the highest 86.3 percent in Kathmandu whereas adult literacy ranges from the lowest 37 percent in Mahottari to 84 percent in Kathmandu. The trend of national literacy rate in Nepal is as follows since 2008-9:

**Table 11: National Literacy Rate**

Literacy Rate [%]	2008-09	2010-11	2014-15
Age 15-24 years	75	80	87.5
Age 6+ years	69	78	88
Age Group 15+ years	56	62	72
Literacy Gender Parity Index [15+ years]	0.74	0.92	0.98

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015

The disparities in literacy rates between men and women, urban and rural areas, among caste and ethnicity, and different regions showings low literacy rate for aged 5+ in the mountain [60.45 percent] and Terai region [61.1 percent] compared to hill region [72 percent]. The census has also reported 17.7 percent point gap between males [75.1 percent] and females [57.4] and 19.74 percent point gap between rural [62.48 percent] and urban [82.22 percent] for the age group 5 and above years. In case of adults, the rate for female lags 22.9 percent point behind the male. Similarly, youth literacy for female lags 9.69 behind the male ranging from lowest 58.5 in Mahottari to the highest 97.4 in Syanja again indication a wide variation among and between districts, gender, caste, region and ecological belts.

There are still over 7.5 million people in the country that can't read and write of which a staggeringly 66 percent is female. Almost 39.1 percent people in the age group of 6 years and above and 43.5 percent people in age group of 15 years and above are illiterate [NLSS, 2011]. This means, nearly 55.5 percent of females compared to 28.4 percent of males lack knowledge and skills to read and write simple sentence and to arithmetic. Similarly, illiteracy is significantly geographically divided with a high concentration of illiterate people living in the central Terai region as almost 58 percent of the total illiterate population living in the Terai regions and almost 39 percent of illiterate living in the central development region [CBS, 2012].

There is sound evidence that female literacy, in particular, has a significant impact on other development indicators. It is a fact that literate mothers give birth to fewer children, they are more likely to survive and that literate mothers are also more likely to enroll their children, both sons and daughters, in school than illiterate mothers. Literate mothers also tend to engage in economic activities which are beneficial to their children, family and the community. Literate Nepal campaign has begun with an aim to eradicate illiteracy in two years. The programs prioritized under this Extension Plan are therefore more like post literacy programs that essentially support continuing education and life skills related vocational and occupational trainings linked with income generation activities.

Adult education in Nepal includes a basic literacy programme [literacy campaign for 6 months], a functional [post] literacy programme [3 months], and education programme for adult women through non-formal mode including community-learning centers. Out of 5,173,979 illiterate people [3,435,336 women], 3,375,607 persons were made literate in 2014 and additional 1,745,334 persons are considered in 2014-15. For the year 2015-16, 4,727,531 neo-literate people will continue on post literacy and community learning centers.

However, there are key challenges and issues to achieve literate Nepal. They include: i] Universalizing literacy where literacy level is just 65.9 percent [Census, 2011] across the country and wider inequality gaps persisting among different groups and regions; ii] translating literacy skills into day practical life and functions; iii] sustaining literacy skills among the neo-literates for continual learning to upgrade their literacy skills; iv] developing an adequate, viable, standardized accreditation/certification of equivalency system; v] effective implementation of skills training programme for livelihood reaching to the really needy groups; and vi] ensuring the access of needy people to alternative schooling within their reach.

## **Pakistan**

Situated on the western edge of South Asia, Pakistan has a population of about 184 million, with sex ratio of 105.6:100. It is estimated that about 62 percent of the people are residing in rural and 38 percent in urban areas. GDP Per Capita Income is US\$ 1,368 for 2012-13. Pakistan is a developing country, steadily

transforming from agriculture-based economy to an increasing share of industry and services sectors in the GDP [3.6 percent growth in 2012-13].

In the past, Pakistan has not been spending enough on provision of basic social services to the people. Continuous fast increase in population [3.1 percent during 1990s and 2 percent in 2000s] has eaten up or diluted benefits of the investment on development. Illiteracy, rapid population growth and slow economic development have increased unemployment, blocked evolution of socio-political institutions and democratic norms in the society. Due to illiteracy and poverty, health indicators are also low in Pakistan. One-third children are born underweight and infant mortality rate is high.

Education indicators are still dismally low, although steady progress has been noticed during last few decades. At present, about one third primary school age children are out of school, 42 percent population [age 10+] is illiterate. Wide discrepancies persist in education indicators pertaining to provinces/areas, location [urban vs. rural] and gender. At the national level, about two third women of age 15+ cannot read and write, and 35 percent girls remain out of school. Gender Parity Index in case of participation in primary education is 0.82. It is estimated that over 6.7 million children are out of school, and majority of them [62 percent] are girls.

Pakistan also has an extensive network of Non-Formal Basic Education [NFBE] institutions with an estimated enrolment of at least 2.5 million students. Establishment of Non-formal Basic Education Schools for out-of-school children was an innovative initiative taken by Pakistan. Presently, more than 13,000 Basic Education Community Schools [BECS] are functioning throughout Pakistan, having a total enrolment of around 0.6 million. Local female teachers are employed in more than 80percent of these schools. At the end of grade V, formal sector conducts the examination and allows admission in grade six in formal sector to those who qualify/pass the examination. In other words the graduates of non-formal schools are mainstreamed in grade VI.

Public sector formal school system, which is the largest service provider in Pakistan, consists of 12 academic years. It starts from Primary and ends at Intermediate level or Higher Secondary School Certificate [HSSC]. Pre-primary classes [local name Katchi class, translation: Pre-Primary; premature or not ripe yet] can be found in schools, but this level is not recognized in terms of budgetary provision or examination. Private sector caters for educational needs of about one third enrolled children having diverse streams, some following public sector national curricula, while others opting for curricula of Cambridge International Examinations.

The children of upper-middle classes, residing in urban localities, mostly attend high cost private schools, offering foreign curricula and international examination systems [O and A levels] and are staffed with qualified and trained teachers, well-equipped classrooms, all essential facilities of good quality, and imported teaching-learning materials. Majority of the children, residing mainly in rural and semi-urban areas and belonging to the low income families, attend public schools which offer free education but are characterized by poor quality of education due to lack of physical facilities, shortage or absence of teachers, and non-availability of suitable learning materials.

In addition to the public and private schools, there is another stream of 'Deeni Madrassas' [Religious Schools] offering free religious education with free boarding and lodging. These Madrassas are usually managed by local communities and are financed through charity and donations. These parallel systems of education in Pakistan have perpetuated inequalities and economic stratifications, and are causing behavioral divisions and social conflict in the society.

The key challenges to education are: [i] lack of access to education; and [ii] poor quality of education; [iii] equity; and [iv] governance. Other influencing factors include budgetary constraints and weak management, which indirectly accentuate the lack of access and poor quality; and a set of external factors such as poverty, adverse law and order situation; and devastation due to natural disasters especially devastating floods of 2010 and annihilating earthquake of 2005.

These challenges are strongly interlinked with poor teaching quality, teacher absenteeism, truancy and/or lack of textbooks etc. As cumulative effect this generates lack of interest/motivation among students who dropout from school – adversely affecting every EFA goal and its corresponding targets. In Pakistan, there are an estimated 52 million adult [15+ years] illiterates, of which 62 percent are females. This is the key challenge for sustainable development in the country as illiterate and unskilled workforce can hardly contribute towards effective social and economic progress. Literacy is a powerful tool in bringing peace and harmony into societies.

### **Sri Lanka**

The population of Sri Lanka is 20.26 million [Census, 2011] with 1.0 percent growth rate. The decline in the rate of population increase has led to a reduction in the young dependency ratio which is a favorable development for the education sector as the decreasing numbers will enable the authorities to divert more resources for education quality improvement. Having 0.691 HDI value, Sri Lanka enjoys a higher level of quality of life with 94.5 percent literacy rate, 74 years of life expectancy and infant mortality at 8 per 1,000 live births- impressive social development indicators.

These are the results of the social welfare measures pursued by successive governments after independence, to which free education and free health services have made a remarkable contribution. Sri Lanka has a good education system with 98.3 percent primary enrollment with less than 0.23 percent drop-out rate. Secondary education enrollment and completion rate is almost 98.5 percent. The literacy rate is 94.5 percent with 75 percent population completing the secondary education. Student teacher ratio [17:1] is the lowest in the SAARC countries. Most of the schools have sanitary facilities [96.4 percent], school library [64 percent] and computer facilities. The general education span is of 13 years' duration from age 5 to 18 years. At present education is compulsory from 5 to 14 years. A policy decision has been taken to increase the upper age limit to 16 years.

The non-formal education [NFE] programs in Sri Lanka include a wide variety of programs offered through Functional Literacy Centers [out-of school children], Community Learning Centers [CLC], Vocational Training Centers, and Residential Centers for under-privileged or street children [MOE, 2011]. Functional Literacy Centers offer courses for out-of-school children and drop out children to impact functional literacy whereas CLCs have mandate from simple literacy to life enrichment courses and skills training programs. Similarly, Vocational Training Centers focus on income-generated training programs and upgrading youth's skills [MOE, 2011].

The NFE programs cater to the needs of out of schoolchildren and adult groups in the community that include: i] Functional literacy centers are concentrating on non-school going children [not enrolled in a school or have dropped out prematurely from school] who attend these classes and show progress are admitted to formal schools while the others continue in the center until they achieve basic literacy, numeracy and life skills and join a vocational center for further training; ii] community learning centers provide continuing education opportunities for different target groups including income generation activities for unemployed youth and mothers and skills development training like health and nutrition,

home gardening and house-keeping; iii] vocational training centers provide vocational training to youth who are desirous of improving their vocational skills in and around schools and classes like carpentry, masonry, welding electrical wiring, electronics, automobile repairs, radio and TV repairs, catering, agriculture and agro-based products, handicrafts and computer literacy.

There are also a few special programs such as centers for street children and literacy centers for adults, which are organized in centers where there is a demand. NFE programs generally, cater to the needs of the disadvantaged sectors in society, and it is an important strategy to promote access, equity and inclusion. The aim of the sector plan is to transform the school system to lay the human capital foundation for a knowledge-based economy, focused on the total personality development of children passing out from the school system.

The Education Sector Development Programme [2012-2016] focuses on four policy themes. They include: i] strengthen NFE classes focusing on free and compulsory basic education to out of school children and to expand and improve quality of vocational and community learning Centre; ii] establishing primary and secondary school networks at divisional level to provide high quality education for children in the neighborhood; and iii] improving learning environment of the secondary schools with higher- order learning spaces both child friendly school and child centric learning methods.

## **SAARC Regional Analysis**

In line with human rights commitment to UN conventions and resolutions and influenced by the MDGs and the EFA goals and in light with the emerging challenges, SAARC countries are putting efforts into improving key aspects in education including wider access to education, expansion of free and compulsory basis education, improvement in the quality of education and promotion of inclusive education and gender parity. Governments across the region have emphasized to achieve universal basic education and ensure access to education especially on non-formal classes to all adults and citizen. Most of the countries are producing positive results on MDGs and EFA goals despite the political instability and fragile country situation. For instance access to education, including vocational training and placement in universities and colleges grew by 10 percent each year between 2000 to 2010 [ADB, 2012].

Many countries have initiated policies and programs to improve the quality of their education systems, especially through a focus on learning outcomes. To address the seemingly apparent disconnect between curriculum, pedagogy and the skills necessary to succeed in a globalized and interconnected environment, many countries have introduced policy reforms and innovations in education. Examples of integrating 21-century skills in education policy and practices can be observed across the region from social skills to life skills education, civic education to lifelong learning. Non-formal and informal education system is in forefront and prioritized to empower citizens with democratic norms, values, principles and to expand livelihood opportunities and voice in decision-making.

The effective governance of education including school and community level authority and responsibility, better ways of attracting and retaining capable teachers and establishing and improving teacher performance standards, assessment of student outcomes focusing on both assessment of learning and for learning, mobilizing and using resources better to achieve the goals of quality with equity, and exploiting ICT potentials in education. To support the delivery of quality education, all the SAARC countries have endeavored to promote decentralization management and governance of education systems and schools. School based management system, which commonly involve both the community and schools directly in management and development of curriculum, textbooks and grading system in a



child friendly manner. Policies related to child friendly schooling and community-school collaboration are in top of the education reform agenda to build and promote accountable and responsive school governance and education sector.

Improving girls' participation in education and development interventions are equally prioritized in all the SAARC countries as a part of school reform. Education system in the region has achieved gender parity at primary level but still lagging behind at secondary and tertiary level. Governments in the region are tackling this issue by introducing targeted measures aimed at promoting equity in education. For example, monthly stipends or scholarships to all girls to attract and retain in school education and separate toilets for girls in each school, provisions of sanitary pads and counseling services to girls, quota system for recruiting more female teachers and mandatory provisions for female in school management committee and parent teachers association.

The SAARC can be a useful platform and an opportunity for sharing common historical development and socio-economic context and similar educational development challenges – to articulate policy objectives, goals and strategies for the post-2015 education agenda. A common framework for the South Asia position can be articulated as the discourse on post-2015 education agenda continue in the run-up in line with Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] 2030. The poor and the disadvantaged must not be left out from a resurgent and emerging Asian Century. All must have a stake in it and claim their due by expanding their own capabilities through education and learning.

Thus, SAARC countries are promoting literacy as the "ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts". In addition to non-formal classes, community learning center after literacy as a continuum of learning to enable individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society are in priority.

The ninth Summit at Male in 1997, for the first time, all Leaders in the SAARC countries recognized that economic and social development cannot be ensured without optimum utilization of human resources for which education is a sine qua non. They also realized that illiteracy was one of the major causes impeding the development of the vast human resources of South Asia and a major factor contributing to the region's economic backwardness and social imbalance. This has resulted that each country in SAARC region initiated to make literacy for each citizen a reality through national campaign. The selected national literacy campaign since 2000 in the SAARC member countries are as follows:

**Table 12: National Campaign for Illiterates**

Countries	Name of Campaign	Year of launch	No of Illiterate Person [000]	Target
Bangladesh	National Action Plan	2010	49036	100 percent by 2015
India	Saakshar Bharat Abhiyan	2009	283105	80 percent by 2017
Nepal	Literate Nepal Campaign	2009	7604	100 percent by 2015
Pakistan	NCHD Literacy Program	2010		85 percent by 2015

Source: UNESCO, 2015

The table below shows that Maldives and Sri Lanka are leading the life expectancy among SAARC countries. Unemployment rate has not been reduced since last ten years.

**Table 13: Life Expectancy and Unemployment Rate**

Countries	Life Expectancy	Unemployment Rate [%]			
		2000	2005	2010	2015
Afghanistan	60	7.9	8.5	8.4	8.5
Bangladesh	70	3.3	4.3	4.5	4.1
Bhutan	68	1.7	3.1	3.3	2.3
India	67	4.3	4.4	3.5	3.7
Maldives	77	-	-	-	-
Nepal	68	2.7	2.5	2.7	2.7
Pakistan	66	7.2	7.1	5	5.4
Sri Lanka	75	7.7	7.7	4.9	4.5

Source: World Development Indicators, 2015

The HDI is a comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy, education and standards of living for worldwide countries. Similarly South Asian people have just been half-human being in term of human development index as average HDI is about 0.5, as shown below:

**Table 14: Human Development Index in SAARC Region**

Countries	Human Development Index			
	2000	2005	2010	2013
Afghanistan	0.341	0.396	0.453	0.468
Bangladesh	0.453	0.494	0.539	0.558
Bhutan	-	-	0.569	0.584
India	0.483	0.527	0.57	0.586
Maldives	0.599	0.659	0.688	0.698
Nepal	0.449	0.477	0.527	0.54
Pakistan	0.454	0.504	0.526	0.537
Sri Lanka	0.679	0.71	0.736	0.75

Source: UNDP, 2015

Much has been achieved in South Asia in getting more children to school. National legislation and policies are in place in line with international frameworks like the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child [UNCRC]. Each state has strong commitment to upholding the right to education for all children. Yet, the unfortunate reality is that the numbers of out-of-school children in South Asia are simply staggering. The latest data indicate there are 7.57 million children between the ages 5 to 10 who are not attending school in the region. Another 25.29 million children between the ages 11 to 13 should be in secondary education but are not in school at all. The following table shows the mean years of schooling among adults in SAARC countries:



**Table 15: Mean Years of Schooling**

Name of Country	Mean years of schooling [adults]			
	2000	2005	2010	2013
Afghanistan	2.1	2.5	3.2	3.2
Bangladesh	3.7	4.4	5.1	5.1
Bhutan	..	..	2.3	2.3
India	3.6	4	4.4	4.4
Maldives	4.2	5	5.8	5.8
Nepal	2.4	2.7	3.2	3.2
Pakistan	3.3	4.5	4.6	4.7
Sri Lanka	10	10.4	10.8	10.8

Source: UN, 2015

Children not attending school are in most cases unaccounted for in school records. They are therefore “invisible” and often not considered in policy and decision-making. The lack of data and information on children who are the most excluded from education are making it even more difficult to reach these children. In addition there is a lack of tools and methodologies needed to identify children who are not attending school.

South Asia has seen significant achievements in strengthening education systems and getting more children to school. Enrolment rates in primary education have reached 90 percent in 2011 for the region, up from 75 percent in 2000. More importantly, this growth has been accompanied by a sizeable progress in enrolling girls, with net enrolment rates for the region indicating 88 percent of the total primary school going age girls are now in school, up from 68 percent in 2000.

National laws and policies have been introduced in line with the CRC and other international frameworks. Countries have committed to achieve the MDGs and the EFA goals. Across the region, strategies for a more equitable development in education have been developed. Education was identified as a major priority area during MDGs 2015 and also in the Post 2015 development agenda discussions. Yet, the unfortunate reality is that millions of children in South Asia are still out of school. Literacy campaigns and free and compulsory education efforts are offering these children education opportunities.

### **Strategic Priorities for Non-Formal Education [NFE]**

All the SAARC member countries prioritize continuing literacy and lifelong learning initiatives in order to enhance literacy skills. Achieving literacy levels for all, by targeting hard to reach, have marginalized communities. Similarly, schools are made responsible to mobilize secondary level students in order to make illiterate adults in their community literate. Few countries like Maldives and Sri Lanka are developing national qualification framework to facilitate the accreditation and equivalency of non-formal and informal learning.

Each country is strengthening the Community Learning Centers [CLCs] to empower neo-literate to better manage literacy and lifelong learning programs based on the community needs. This also leads targeted alternative schooling as a part of open and distance learning. Post literacy and Continuous and lifelong learning programs are targeted in pockets of marginalized communities with higher number of neo literates. Post literacy include income general and livelihood related skill development training

programs in the rural and urban areas targeting to the pockets of marginalized, and poverty ridden and conflict affected women and out of school youth.

The CLCs with capacity building activities, resources and technology can make neo-literate sustain their learning by implementing literacy and lifelong learning skills learn in the functional literacy classes. All CLCs, in phase wise manner, can support for life-long-learning through reading center/library and ICT facilities to promote reading culture and sustain literacy among neo literates. Additionally, they will also provide support to develop profile of respective local government that will help them for literacy mapping, assessing local needs of people and planning the relevant continuous learning programs based on the information of the profile developed.

The best practices on continuous and lifelong learning programs can be to expand it to more districts in which, local experts can collaborate to develop contextual learning materials. Local community can take over the ownership to manage information based planning, programming and decision making at local level. Local FMs and other print and electronic media can facilitate national as well as local level stakeholders and individual for continuous and lifelong learning.

## 5. Policies and Plans of Education for Promotion of Human Resources

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation [SAARC] is a regional platform of eight countries of the South Asia mainly Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to accelerating economic growth, social progress and cultural development that promote the welfare of people and improve their quality of life, peace, stability and progress. This region is rich, complex and varied plurality of cultural and religious traditions. The tenth SAARC summit in Colombo in 1998 acknowledged that illiteracy was a major impediment to economic development and social emancipation and agreed that the eradication of illiteracy in the region was a priority for cooperative endeavors. The forum directed to strengthen regional cooperation for joint sharing of expertise, resources and learning among member states including to explore and to expand open learning and distance education and Open University system.

Definition of literacy has constantly changed over the time. It used to be the personal ability to read and write and do arithmetic in 1950s which has now been a powerful vehicle to empower people and a continuum of skills that enables individuals to achieve their goals in work and life and to participate fully in society [UNESCO, 2015]. The SAARC countries have a vision to achieve a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy, especially for women and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults. They also continued their commitment for making UN literacy decade [2003-2012] a success, however, suffered from many challenges to get this a reality. The expansion of universal primary education as the constitutional rights has positively contributed to increase literacy rate in the region.

Both the formal and non-formal education programs are running in this region in order to provide education to their citizens as a fundamental right. The constitution of each state guarantees the rights of all citizens to basic education. Education policies and acts have provisioned to materialize this right with a targeted approach of interventions in a gradual manner. In recent years, NFE has become an important phenomenon and a strategy in all countries of the region in providing educational opportunities to out-of-school children and adults who never got chance to enroll in the formal education system.

The NFE programs varied in nature, duration, content and type. For developing skilled and democratic human resource, it is evident that most countries in the region have established two or more of the four types of non-formal education program: a] literacy and post-literacy; b] equivalency; c] vocational training; and d] life skills and livelihood development programs [UNESCO, 2015]. In addition to free and compulsory provision of basic education, the key vision of literacy in the region is to ensure learning to learn concept for all citizens both at home and at work as a life-long learning process. This does not only focus on 3Rs - reading, writing and doing arithmetic, but also 4Rs -aware on rights and responsibilities, identify rules of the game and explore their respective roles in the society and in the state structures and mechanism where decisions are made/taken place [Dahal, 2014].

Non-formal education has not been remained only a sole business of national or local government. Many international, national and local NGOs are providing non-formal education. All of them claimed that such programs are always aiming for increasing awareness and improving income generation of the poor and disadvantaged groups. In all circumstances, non-formal education operates alongside the formal education system, which is flexible in terms of curriculum, organization and management.

It is also responsive to the needs of special groups of learners and is inclusive of all who wish to learn. The conventional and modern non-formal education programme can be shown in a continuum where the former focuses on literacy and the later concentrated its focus on empowerment, skill development and

bridging to the formal education system. Thus the notion of literacy is to build human capability and competencies of people to enjoy their fundamental rights with proper voices and rational choices on day-to-day life and business of the society and the state organs. The vision of SAARC countries is to make its each citizen literate by 2017 as most of them could not achieved it by 2015.

## **Policies of Member States for Promotion of HRD and NFE**

The following section includes the brief review of the policies and practices of human resource development through non-formal education programme of the South Asian countries.

### **Afghanistan**

Education in Afghanistan is highly influenced by the Islamic morals which equally aim to promote national unity, independence, rule of law, respect for human rights and democracy, tolerance, peace and stability; and help to eradicate poverty, violence and drugs [UNESCO and International Bureau of Education, 2011]. The education system must promote ethical, emotional, cognitive, physical and social development, and improve the problem solving, critical thinking skills, creativity and scientific thinking of all students including those with special needs.

Article 43 of the Constitution of 2004 stipulates that Education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan, which shall be offered free of charge up to the BA level [e.g. undergraduate level] in the state educational institutes. One of the objectives of education is to eliminate illiteracy and provide grounds for accelerated learning for the children and adults who are left behind from the school in the country. State institutions run the literacy courses and community-based education.

Non-formal education in Afghanistan is often used interchangeably with the term functional literacy which includes life skills [generally six months in duration] and productive or livelihoods activities [six to eighteen months in duration]. The former generally refers to the skills and knowledge associated with such topics as improved health and hygiene, literacy and numeracy, peace and tolerance, and child development whereas later refers to vocational, technical and livelihoods training, for example, areas such as carpentry, plumbing, agriculture, animal husbandry, handicrafts, and tailoring [Deyo, 2007].

Accelerated learning programs also exist in Afghanistan, which covers the primary school curriculum in a shorter time than it requires in the formal schools. One of the principle targets of adult and literacy programs in Afghanistan is to provide non-literate with access to basic and post-literacy opportunities in all over the country. In addition, community-based, home-based, and accelerated learning programs for youth and adults are also running under the equivalency programs.

### **Bangladesh**

As per the article 17 of the Constitution of 1972 [amended in 2004], the State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of removing illiteracy within such time as may be determined by law. It also aims to remove illiteracy through the means of education. Mass education in Bangladesh refers to non-formal education for out-of-school children, youth and adults in basic literacy, simple numeracy and life skills [UNESCO, 2011]. Education policy and planning have guided basic education development in Bangladesh since 1990 with: i] Compulsory Primary Education Act 1990; ii] EFA National Plan of Action I and II [1992-2000, 2003-15]; iii] National Non-Formal Education Policy 2006 and Non-formal Education Act 2014; iv] National Education Policy 2010; v] National Skill Development Policy 2011; vi] The Sixth Five Year Plan 2011-15; and vii] Vision 2021/Perspective Plan 2011-21.

The goal of Non-formal Education Policy 2006 aims to "contribute to fulfilling EFA goals and alleviating poverty as spelled out in the EFA National Plan of Action II, 2003-2015 and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper [PRSP], by creating a community-based network of learning centers, aimed at reducing illiteracy by at least 50 percent by 2015, extending opportunities for effective skill training and continuing education and creating lifelong learning opportunities".

The Education Policy 2010 proposes raising compulsory primary education to grade 8 by 2018 and expanding vocational/technical training. A recently approved literacy project [February 2014] will be the first major adult literacy project since 2003 and is expected to serve 4.5 million young adults as will literate human resource in 3 years. The Sixth Five-Year National Development Plan [2011-16] and a perspective plan for ten years up to 2021 formulated to begin implementation of the vision for development. A National Skill Development Policy of 2011 recognizes the importance of skills and capacity building related to employment and livelihood in fighting poverty. These different articulations of policies and priorities called for looking critically at what have been achieved and what may be foreseen in education and human development.

In addition, there are other policies and laws which have influenced educational development in varying degrees. These include: Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development Policy 2013, National Women Development Policy 2011, National Children Policy 2011, and Disabled Persons Rights and Protection Act 2013.

In Bangladesh, the role of non-formal education is being taken as a tool to serve national development aspirations and the goals of individual self-realization [Sing, 2002]. Both the government run and non-governmental organizations run non-formal education programs in Bangladesh. Non-formal education programs include basic literacy, post-literacy and continuing education programs. Basic literacy programme focuses on functionally useful and sustainable level of literacy skills whereas post-literacy and continuing education courses offer on literacy enhancement and income earning skills. All these literacy initiatives are running with a view to contribute to poverty alleviation through HRD.

## **Bhutan**

Bhutan is a country where Gross National Happiness [GNH] is taken as one of the means for the overall development of a country in consistency with the culture, institutions and spiritual values. Article 9 of the new Constitution of 2008 stipulated that the State shall endeavor to provide education for the purpose of improving and increasing knowledge, values and skills of the entire population with education being directed towards the full development of the human personality. Article 16 further specifies that the State shall provide free education to all children of school going age to tenth standard and ensure that technical and professional education is made generally available and that higher education is equally accessible to all on merit basis.

In Bhutan, Education has been considered as an important part of the religious life [Sing, 2002] where community schools are used for adult literacy and other non-formal educational programs. Bhutan 2020 articulates the vision is to provide a quality education, that ensures the realization of the innate potential of each and every child; instills an awareness of the nation's unique cultural heritage, and values, both traditional and universal; prepares young people for the world of work, instilling in them the dignity of labour; and creates an awareness of the potential and importance of agriculture as an occupation. It is called as a wholesome education in Bhutan that will nurture and encourage its citizens to be mindful, reflective, creative, skillful, successful, confident, active and informed, capable of contributing

effectively to the realization of GNH and the values therein, and building a peaceful, democratic, sovereign, secure, stable and self-reliant Bhutan, full of creativity and vitality [MOE, 2010].

Thus, the role of education is to equip the young generation with the appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are required to formulate and implement new ways of achieving the goals of GNH, in the context of the dynamics of local, national and global realities and developments. Being a powerful instrument of HRD, education plays a vital role in the process of social transformation and the achievement of national goals and priorities.

The education system in Bhutan includes formal, non-formal, and monastic schools. Non-formal education includes the literacy programs where NEF centers run such programs at the community level. The non-formal centers provide basic literacy skills for all ages. [www.education.gov.bt]. Basic literacy courses [12 months of 2-hour evening classes] under non-formal education system in Bhutan are offered for those people who could not attend general education courses in formal setting.

These non-formal education courses are provided through non-formal education centers [NFEC] all over the country. In addition, continuing education programs are also available for adults wishing to complete the basic education since 2006. After completing the basic literacy courses, participants can attend post literacy courses [9 months of 2-hour evening classes]. It is also appropriate for those who have dropped out of school. Women and students from rural areas with full time day jobs are highly benefited from these non-formal courses because these courses are offered according to the local needs in order to provide basic literacy and numeracy skills. Non-formal courses cover reading and writing skills, which are equivalent to grade 8 of formal education system.

## India

The original Article 45 in the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Indian Constitution had mandated the State to endeavor to provide free and compulsory education to all children until they complete the age of fourteen years within a period of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution in 1947. The national resolve to achieve universal elementary education gained further momentum with the adoption of the Constitution [86th Amendment] Act, 2002 which inserted Article 21-A in the Constitution of India to provide free and compulsory education for all children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine. This amendment also enjoins the State “to provide early childhood care and education to all children until they complete the age of six years”. Article 46 of the Indian Constitution enjoins that “the State shall promote, with special care, the education and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of social exploitation”. Similarly, Article 30[1] provides for the rights of the minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

In line with this, a key milestone in India's march towards Education for All was the adoption of the National Policy on Education 1986 [revised in 1992], which states, “Education is essentially for all”. The policy include: i] national system of education which implies that “up to a given level, all students, irrespective of caste, creed, location or sex, have access to education of a comparative quality”; ii] early Childhood Care and Education [ECCE] “both as a feeder and a strengthening factor for primary education and for human resource development in general”; iii] focus on universal access and enrolment, universal retention of children up to 14 years of age; and a substantial improvement in the quality of education to enable all children achieve essential levels of learning; iv] emphasis “on the removal of



disparities and to equalize educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality”; [v] widening of access to secondary education with emphasis on enrolment of girls, Scheduled Castes [SCs], Scheduled Tribes [STs], particularly in science, commerce and vocational streams; vi] education for women equality, with special emphasis on the removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in, elementary education;

vii] the introduction of systematic, well-planned and rigorously implemented programs of vocational education aimed at developing a healthy attitude amongst students towards work and life, enhancing individual employability, reducing the mismatch between the demand and supply of skilled manpower, and providing an alternative to those intending to pursue higher education without particular interest or purpose; viii] making adult education programs a mass movement involving literacy campaigns and comprehensive programs of post-literacy and continuing education for neo-literates and youth who have received primary education with a view to enabling them to retain and upgrade their literacy skills, and to harness it for the improvement of their living and working condition; ix] overhauling of the system of teacher education with emphasis on continuing professional development of teachers, establishment of District Institutes of Education and Training [DIET] with the capability to organize pre-service and in-service training of elementary school teachers, and up-gradation of selected secondary teacher training colleges.

This has been further guaranteed by the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education [RTE] Act, 2009, which became operative on 1 April 2010, has laid a solid foundation on which future policies and programs relating to elementary education could be built. Aligning the policies and practices with the objectives of the RTE Act and achieving the goal of providing good quality free and compulsory education to all children in the age group 6-14 years will continue to be one of the key education development priorities.

This RTE Act, 2009 was amended in 2012 which came into force with effect from 1 August 2012. The Amendment Act inter alia provides for: [i] inclusion of children with disability as contained in the Persons with Disabilities Act 2005 and the National Trust Act under the purview of RTE Act and providing them free and compulsory education, and providing option for home-based education for children with severe disability; [ii] protection of the rights of minorities provided under Article 29 and 30 of the Constitution while implementing the RTE Act; [iii] exemption of Madrasas, Vedic Pathshalas and educational institutions imparting religious instruction from the RTE Act.

Similarly, the National Youth Policy of 2014 seeks to empower youth [15-29 years] of the country to achieve their full potential. The policy aims to: [i] Create a productive workforce that can make a sustainable contribution to India's economic development; [ii] develop a strong and healthy generation equipped to take on future challenges; [iii] instill social values and promote community service to build national ownership; [iv] facilitate participation and civic engagement at levels of governance; and [v] support youth at risk and create equitable opportunity for all disadvantaged and marginalized youth. The priority areas of this policy include: education, employment and skill development, entrepreneurship, health and healthy lifestyles, sports, promotion of social values, community engagement, participation in politics and governance, youth engagement, inclusion and social justice.

This has been further prioritized in the 12th five year plan [2012-2017] for the expansion of educational opportunities that are available to all segments of the society, and to improve quality of education. The Plan targets for school education and literacy include: [i] ensuring universal access and, in keeping with the letter and spirit of the RTE Act, providing good-quality free and compulsory education to all children



in the age group of 6 to 14 years; [ii] improving attendance and reduce dropout rates at the elementary level to below 10 per cent and lower the percentage of out-of-school children at the elementary level to below 2 per cent for all socio-economic and minority groups and in all States; [iii] increasing enrolments at higher levels of education and raise the Gross Enrolment Ratio [GER] at the secondary level to over 90 per cent, at the higher secondary level to over 65 per cent; [iv] raising the overall literacy rate to over 80 per cent and reducing the gender gap in literacy to less than 10 per cent; [v] providing at least one year of well-supported/well-resourced pre-school education in primary schools to all children, particularly those in educationally backward blocks [EBBs]; and [vi] improving learning outcomes that are measured, monitored and reported independently at all levels of school education.

The principal programme for universalization of primary education is the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan [SSA]. The overall goals of the SSA are: [i] all children in schools; [ii] bridging all gender and social category gaps at primary and upper primary stages of education [iii] universal retention; and [iv] elementary education of satisfactory quality. The non-formal education in India includes a variety of programs ranging from adult education programs to the mass literacy programs and continuing education programs through different means and modes. One of the major initiatives taken by the Government of India in this regard was National Literacy Mission which was launched in 1988 with a view to impart functional literacy to all citizen. This has been renewed in 2009 as literate Bharat mission to achieve by 2017.

Thus access to education is the fundamental right of each citizen and obligation of the State including for adult education that reduces economic, social and gender disparities in India. Lifelong education is taken as one of the goals of the educational process. This presupposes universal literacy programs. Opportunities will be provided to the youth, housewives, agricultural and industrial workers and professionals to continue the education of their choice, at the pace suited to them [UNESCO, 2011].

## **Maldives**

The Article 36 of the Constitution of 2008 stipulates that everyone has the right to education without discrimination of any kind. Primary and secondary education shall be freely provided by the State. It is imperative on parents and the State to provide children with primary and secondary education. Opportunity for higher education shall be generally accessible to all citizens. Education shall strive to inculcate obedience to Islam, instill love for Islam, foster respect for human rights, and promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all people.

In 2009 the Education Act was drafted by the sector. The Act establishes a strong legal framework for the provision of education from preschool to higher education. It states the provision of compulsory education, the establishment of school boards to support decentralization of education management, laid down standards for higher education providers, and requirement for teacher registration and duties and responsibilities of duty bearers.

One of the goals of the education system is to provide lifelong educational opportunities to all citizens. The role of non-formal education promotes community education, enhances lifelong learning and conducts adult literacy programs across the islands [UNESCO, 2011]. As per the National Literacy Policies 2002 of Maldives, the goal of non-formal education and training aims to enhance the quality of life of the Maldivian people. In order to achieve such goal, self-developmental opportunities to those who have missed out on regular formal education are provided. In addition, strategically selected programs of community and adult education are also offered to empower members of the community

with the skills needed for productive employment and advancement. Making every Maldivian literate is also a government priority.

Schooling in Maldives is free and the costs involved in sending children to school are relatively low. The literacy rate in Maldives is very high with more than 98 per cent. Despite of that non-formal education in Maldives is being carried out to increase awareness and teach skills for youth and adults, and produce newspapers, magazines, posters and other such material to increase awareness.

## Nepal

Planned development of modern education system in Nepal is in place since 1954 with the recommendations of the first national education commission [MoE, 1992]. School education was rapidly expanded only after the restoration of democracy in 1990 with an ambition to promote democracy, decentralization and skilled human resources for the country to alleviate poverty. For the first time, access to education was recognized as the fundamental right of citizen only in 2007 while promulgating the interim constitution. Article 31 of the Nepal's Constitution promulgated by the Constituent Assembly in 2015 guarantees that every citizen shall have the right to free and compulsory basic education from the State and free secondary education as provided in the law [MoLJCAPA, 2015].

A 7 years school sector reform programme [SSRP] from ECED to grade 12 is in operation since July 2009. This programme aims to ensure free and compulsory basic education and free secondary education in line with fundamental rights of citizens. For ensuring such provision, both the formal and non-formal education programs are in practice at present. The overall goal of non-formal education is to raise the level of adult literacy, particularly amongst women and people belonging to marginalized groups through the provision of appropriate life-long learning and life skills education and vocational training to all youths and adults.

Following the state's commitment on EFA and MDGs, Government of Nepal introduced the Non-formal Education Policy in 2007 with an ambition to eradicate illiteracy from Nepal by 2015. For this, policy aims to expand the non-formal education in providing the academic and practical knowledge, skills and information to different age and levels of learners [MOE].

The Literate Nepal Mission as the national mass literacy campaign targets to all children, youths and adults who due to whatsoever reasons missed access to formal education with the three key strategies [MoE, 2012]. These strategy includes: i] System of non-formal education, with provisions of outside formal educational settings has been developed to address adult literacy, basic education for out of school children, life skills, income generation related education activities; ii] literate Nepal as a policy to incorporate in the main education policies as well as in national level plans like school sector reform plan and also to establish literacy as a priority among I/NGOs and CBOs that work at local level; and, iii] legislative framework to implement free and compulsory basic education and free secondary education as right to every citizen and community.

Adult education in Nepal includes a basic literacy programme [literacy campaign], a functional [post] literacy program, and education programme for adult women through non-formal mode. In addition, skill training programs for adults offering through short term vocational training programs and projects can also be grouped under the broader umbrella of non-formal education program. Hence, three different approaches are used in Nepal for making people literate, through basic literacy programs, functional literacy programs and accelerated learning programs for school age children and adults [school out-reach and alternative mode for primary level, open and distance mode up to secondary level].

## **Pakistan**

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan [1973] promised to its citizens in Article 37 [b] & [c] that "the State shall remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within the minimum possible period; make technical and professional education generally available and higher education equally accessible by all on the basis of merit". One key policy reform with positive implications for education was the 18th Amendment in the Constitution by the National Assembly of Pakistan in April 2010 and insertion of Article 25-A. This article envisions that "State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law". With this constitutional provision, free access to school education was recognized as a fundamental constitutional and enforceable right of all children of age 5 to 16 years.

The education in Pakistan is highly influenced by the Quran and Sunnah. One of aims of the education is to educate and train people as a true practicing Muslim. Therefore, the Quranic and Islamic practices are taken as an integral part of the curricula [UNESCO, 2011]. During the past two decades, there were two major education policy interventions; the National Education Policy of 1998-2010; and the National Education Policy 2009. This policy identifies two overarching objectives: [i] widening access to education; and [ii] improving quality. The key policy actions include: i] achieving universal and free primary education by 2015 and up to class 10 by 2025; ii] promoting access and quality of Early Childhood Education; iii] achieving 86 percent Adult Literacy by 2015; and iv] enhancing education budget up to 7 percent of GDP by 2015. The policy further promotes equity in education with the aim to eliminate social exclusion and provision of increased opportunities to marginalized groups, particularly girls.

The government follows the EFA National Plan of Action [2001-15] but has not been successful due to lack of financial support, both indigenous and external. Similarly, another National Plan of Action [2013-16] was formulated in 2013 to accelerate progress towards education related goals and targets identified by MDG/EFA for 2015/16. The plan aims at enhancing enrolment of out-of-school children in primary education ;increasing retention at primary level and completion of primary education by all enrolled children; and improving quality of primary education.

One of the objectives of non-formal education in Pakistan is to raise the literacy rate in the country. Eradication of illiteracy within the shortest possible time through universalizing of quality elementary education coupled with institutionalized adult literacy programs. Non-formal education programs include the expansion of elementary education including non-formal methods and expanded programs of adult education, literacy and functional literacy programs [UNESCO, 2007].

In Pakistan, non-formal learning can take place in the form of literacy training. In addition, it also includes a variety of learning activities [on-the-job skills training and traditional apprenticeships]. The Literacy programs generally cover adults and out-of-school young people's need through adult literacy and non-formal basic education. The 2009 Policy itself highlights the need of preparing a national literacy curriculum and identifying the instructional material, teacher training modules and professional development programs. It also aims to develop and enforce minimum quality standards for organizations involved in literacy in the form of literacy certification and accreditation regime

## **Sri Lanka**

Since 1947 Sri Lanka introduced free education from kindergarten to University level that was further spearheaded in 1961 by taking over of denominational schools into national education system. With

1962's national education commission report, various education reforms were initiated. Among them white paper on education in 1981, national institute of education in 1985 and national education commission in 1991 led to enactment of compulsory education regulations in 1998 by the Parliament. This has been further streamlined with various education reform efforts including education sector development framework and programme [2006-2010].

The Constitution of Sri Lanka envisions for a complete eradication of illiteracy and gives the assurance to all persons of the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels. The national system of education should assist individuals and groups to achieve major national goals that are relevant to the individuals and society. A nine-year elementary education for the children of age 5-14 group is being made compulsory since 1998. Among others, promoting lifelong education and knowledge renewal through formal and non-formal education programme is considered as one of the objectives of education policy relating to non-formal education.

Comprehensive education reforms have been carried out periodically to bring the education system on par with international trends and the recent one was of 2006, which is a landmark in the pursuit of quality improvement in education. The national system of education aims to: i] assist individuals and groups to achieve major national goals that are relevant to the individuals and society; ii] build Sri Lankan identity through the promotion of national cohesion, national integrity, national unity, harmony, and peace, and recognizing cultural diversity in respect for human dignity. Furthermore, the education system creates and supports an environment for mental and physical well-being of individuals and a sustainable life style based on respect for human values. The curriculum aims to develop creativity, initiative, critical thinking, responsibility, accountability and other positive elements of a well-integrated and balanced personality to all children and adults.

Sri Lanka aims for human resource development by: i] educating for productive work that enhances the quality of life of the individual and the nation and contributes to the economic development; ii] preparing individuals to adapt to and manage change, and to develop capacity to cope with complex and unforeseen situation in a rapidly changing world; and iii] fostering attitudes and skills that will contribute to securing an honorable place in the international community, based on justice, equality and mutual respect.

Non-Formal Education [NFE] in Sri Lanka includes a wide variety of programs offered through Functional Literacy Centers [out-of school children], Community Learning Centers [CLC], Vocational Training Centers, and Residential Centers for under-privileged or street children. Functional Literacy Centers offer courses for out-of-school children and drop out children to impact functional literacy whereas CLCs have mandate from simple functional literacy to life enrichment courses, English language and skills training programs for out of school children, youth and adults, and liaise with other ministries, private enterprises, NGO's and community based organizations to provide the necessary services and support. Similarly, Vocational Training Centers focus on income-generated training programs and upgrading youth's skills [MOE, 2011]. Likewise, government offices are responsible to assist schools to organize programs to meet community needs from the perspective of holistic human development.

## **Regional Scenario**

Providing free and compulsory education to all children is a goal that is enshrined in each SAARC country's Constitution as a Fundamental Right. This, indeed, is also the focus of the World Declaration on 'Education for All', adopted nearly 25 years ago, in Jomtien. The World Education Forum, held in

Dakar [2000], reiterated the commitment of the global community and approved a comprehensive set of goals in the areas of early childhood care in education, primary education, gender, youth and adolescent, adult education and quality of education.

Following this commitment, each SAARC Member Country prepared a National Plan of Education till 2015 delineating various programs and strategies for achieving various EFA Goals. Subsequently, the mid-term assessment of progress of EFA goals, undertaken with support from UNESCO, underscored the concern for equity and inclusion and highlighted the need for accelerating the efforts for achieving EFA goals. All SAARC countries, undoubtedly, has made substantial progress towards achieving EFA goals during the last two decades. Following the UNCRC 1989, each country is adopting the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act [RTE] that gives further impetus to the national efforts for ensuring quality education for all in a time-bound manner.

Non-formal education programme can take place in many forms. It is flexible, learner-centered, contextualized and uses a participatory approach with several actors. It is recognized as part-time 'second chance education' for those unable to benefit from regular classes. Such education programme in SAARC countries includes a variety of activities, such as adult and continuing education; life-long education; community education; personal development [cultural, language, fitness and sports] programs; and professional and vocational programs for the unemployed and upgrading workforces. The most important aspect is that it is taken to complement the formal education system with a notion of life-long learning through community learning centers at local level.



## 6. Problems, challenges and opportunities

The HRD is a contested notion and has substantial debate and discussion, especially because the concept is shrouded within managerial hype. It lacks precise formulation and agreement as to its significance when we conjunct it with illiteracy. Further, it is incomplete without explaining 'human resource' and 'illiteracy' based on the situation of developing countries as this region still face challenges on these both notions. In South Asia, the intellectual forces are being migrated in developed countries whereas the huge numbers of unskilled or illiterate forces are in the gulf countries to earn surviving money [citation]; in such, this study has high relevancy.

Therefore, to understand the South Asian context, both human resource and illiteracy need to be pacted with each-other to know complex relation of workable forces in diverse situation with their abilities, skills and knowledge. Particularly, HRD is interlinked with human resource policy, education plan and policies, and an initiative of formal and informal stakeholder on HRD and literacy. It also includes improving performance on the present job [training], preparing individuals for future but identifiable jobs within the organization [education], and helping individuals to grow to meet future organizational growth/development.

The global reports show, South Asian [SA] nations still has poverty, hunger, illiteracy, malnutrition, political instability, inter and intra conflict, which has affected its growth and prosperity. Especially because of the illiteracy, the workable resources were paid low for their hard work and commitment. Consequently, because of low or no income people are under the poverty level which is still a bigger challenge [HDI, 2014]. So, education is a social and personal insurance to uplift the situation of poor as it provides knowledge, skills and confidence to shape the future of people. However at the present situation, we observe both challenges and opportunities within SA region. There is a challenge of ensuring the basic education to all the children in South Asia because of geographical, social and economic disadvantages. And other burning challenges are to practice community based management, capacity of HT and parents, harmonizing the technical and vocational education, bringing those out of school population specially children and youth.

On the contrary, there are opportunities too, such as realization of education need, increasing investment of state, the collective effort of national and international stake to fight against the challenge of illiteracy in on the way. On the basis of these discussions, this chapter presents opportunities and challenges by focusing on illiteracy and Human Resource [HR] on the basis of the international and regional literatures.

The mobility, engagement, employability and of course the education system has been uplifted globally because of the advancement of information, communication and technology [ICT]. In South Asia, this has increased the challenges to accelerate the society in accordance with the advancement of technology because of huge illiterate masses. On other hand the constraints on financial resources, unavailability of appropriate human resource, less adoptability culture in this region.

So, in order to meet this challenge, the best option is the investment on ICT based vocational education. However again, there would be always a question: would these aspects suit the South Asian context within the financial constraint? To address such situation, the alternative options should be investment in vocational education by focusing illiterate, poor and marginalized groups.



The youth unemployment rate is consistently exceeding and this has serious effects in economy as a whole which is creating different social problems. This region has about the quarter of the world's population and among them more than one third are poor, searching for job and employability. The poverty level is high and people are engaged for surviving livelihoods. So both education and livelihood concern is in frontline. Meeting the diverse need and interest of the workable force, formal and alternative modes including mobile modes of education is essential. But, could existing education model and investment on it guarantee the opportunity of job to illiterate one?

In addition, many young workers are unskilled but struggling to find their place in the labor force. 'The issue of raising teacher's quality is single and most significant way to improve learning outcomes and its benefits are expected to translate national economics [Parajuli, et al., 2015] creating able and needed human resource in the market. Hanushek [2011] noted in United State that there is substantial relation between higher teacher qualities with annual marginal gain [earning]. He further noted that the teacher who is of one standard deviation above, would generate annual marginal gains of US\$400,000 in terms of the present value of future student earnings or/and more when the situation favor.

However, the situation in South Asia is quite different. In this region, still there is challenge of poverty. Because of this poverty, illiteracy is going upwards. On other hand, in formal education, it is difficult to calculate the economic value with the quality of teacher because of diversified society, our social-political situation and less availability of quality resources. The teacher's role is magnified with other role too. They are not only a school subordinate but in addition a social and political leader and activist of NGO, and serving the huge masses of poor and illiterate one [UNICEF, 2010]. Their involvement beyond the profession, we cannot claim their efficiency decreases but in fact it is true, s/he cannot put her/his all effort in school.

The quality of a teacher is not only limited to the time s/he gives in school but there are other fundamental issues such as investments on teacher training, social recognition, security and salaries concern, which are also associated with the concern of quality teacher in one or other way.

Still the investment and rational distribution of resource such as teachers, learning materials, book and other facility in rural and urban slums has a big gap. In South Asia, majority of the students are in remote areas or urban slums, where they reach school by walking long distance or having inadequate transportation facilities. And this is one of the reasons of getting the chance to student to be out of school [UNICEF, 2014]. The UNICEF report further states schooling disadvantages between urban and rural. In metropolitan of slums of Bangladesh, around 2.5 children are likely to be excluded from school. Similarly, the slum dwellers, street children, and also rural children of India has similar schooling situation [UNICEF, 2014]. The situation of Nepal, Afghanistan do not have different situation in comparison to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh as majority of children live in rural. Also in Nepal the students have to walk at least a half an hour to reach school [in some places of rural area]. This challenge has created trouble to the students to attend school comfortably.

About more than one third of the population in South Asia, at the average, lives below the poverty line. All the countries still have problem with poverty, it directly impacted to an opportunity to be literate. The data shows that in India 44 percent of the population are under poverty line. They earn USD 1/day. The situation of Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh is relatively better and it is at 38 percent, 31 percent and 29 percent respectively. In the global figure, there is not much shining indicators of South Asia because still female illiteracy is one of the major challenges. The headcount ratio for the chronically poor has been declining in many parts of the region – particularly in southern and western India, and in Bangladesh.

Most human development indicators also have improved over the past two decades; although in Afghanistan years of war have obstructed almost all potential progress [UNDP, 2014].

For poor family education is not an urgent need. Due to poverty in many South Asian countries students are engaged at home in helping their parents, taking care of their younger ones, support their mother/father to earn money for survivals. And this is the reason why they do not attend the conventional education. Approaching these student and parents is still big challenges in these areas.

The UNESCO Institute for statistics illustrates that still there are 7.57 million of children between the ages of 5 to 10 who are out of school in South Asia. Further the data shows 25.29 million children between the ages of 11 to 13 should be in secondary education but they are also not in mainstream of school education. This is a big challenge for South Asian education, despite of strong global and national policy, government and other responsible stakeholder's investment in education, the children are not able reach for continue of school education. The national policies are adopted by the government in line with international frameworks such as Convention of the Rights of the Child [CRC], EFA, MGD, however the above mentioned data shows bitter scenario. Specially focusing India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh which has more population, still majority of student are out of school. The study taken by UNICEF [2014] in four countries show that there are a total of about 27 million children out of school in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, of whom 17 million are of primary school-age and 9.9 million of lower secondary school-age.

Child laborer is another challenge in South Asian nations. Student who belongs to poor families, followed by indigenous and Dalit, children from households engaged in agriculture or livestock-raising, girls, and children living far from school are engaged as labor force [UNICEF, 2010] do not get opportunity to go to school and learn. Also, the school age children are compelled for child labor either because of family economic status or domestic violence. Comparing with global scenario, in South Asia 3 percent child are engaged as labor force. In Pakistan only the percentage of child labor is 16 percent. In India and Bangladesh almost 12 percent children labors are found [UNICEF, 2014]. In Nepal, the child labor is 42 percent and this is much higher among 10-14 years than among 5-9 ages [CWIN-Nepal, 2014]. In all of the countries the female number of child labor is high. These children are employed mostly in small restaurants, vehicles, tea shops etc. The child labor children especially belong to ethnic and minority group.

The South Asians are gradually adopting the policy against corporal punishment which is breach of children's fundamental right, however, physical penalties is still thrive today and widely used by teacher in this region, despite it is illegal. Many western counties have banned corporal punishment and had introduced several laws regarding it. However, the supreme court of India brought law in the year 2000. The school and teacher advocate this kind of punishment, which is a challenge. Similarly, Nepal has also introduced the policy against corporal punishment in Education Act 1971 and this policy is more enlarged in the interim constitution of Nepal 2007. The corporal punishment has its root with social and cultural value. The South Asian societies have hierarchical set up and have resulted unequal power relation, respect and relation based upon gender, class, ethnicity, young and elder. This has manifested oppression and violence against weaker section of the community. Violation of children is only by product of such practices.

Monitoring and supervision of the education system should be enhanced with a system of assessment to review performance at each level. The reward and punishment system must be enhanced so that the outstanding performance is rewarded. Due to the weak mechanism still this is a big challenge. Also the

capacity building of parents is one of the effective ways to monitor school locally. The support, encouragement and guidance are vital to motivate their children to go to school and this is possible only after awarding programs to their parents.

### **Opportunities under SAARC Regime**

In spite of above mentioned challenges, there are some indicators which are positive. For instance improving human development indicator, declaring schools as peace zone, increasing number of literates, existence of village development committees, realization of importance of education by parents, and national and international effort to increase literacy are some of the initiatives in some part of this region which can be learned and practiced for the better schooling in other regions also.

Many of the SAARC countries have formulated the policy in line with Convention on the Rights of the Child [1989], ILO Convention [1999], MDGs [2000], Beijing +5 Declaration and Declaration of 'A World Fit for Children' [2002]. Following the global effort, the UN agencies, NGO's and INGOs and governmental organizations are functioning in this region collectively by focusing the literacy and education. Furthermore, specially focusing the literacy, the government of Nepal has developed and implemented a programme of Child-friendly. Nepal has initiated the campaign to declare literate village, where the government has all set to declare 36 districts as literate village by enrolling all uneducated people above the age of 15 in three-months classes that have already commenced across the country.

In 2014 the government has started the mission amazing to declare 'Literate Nepal Mission' as per MGD goal which aim at eliminating illiteracy by 2015. The government has set 12 indicators for literacy which include being able to read and write the letters of the national or mother language, write names of his/her family and own address, have the ability to use a basic calculator and mobile phone, fill up bank vouchers, cheques and have confidence to express oneself in public, along with reading the calendar [Ghimire, 2014]. The NFEC data rate the current literacy status at 70 percent, with Nepal occupying the fourth position in the SAARC region after Maldives [96 percent], Sri Lanka [92.5 percent] and India [74.04 percent].

There is a need of active participation of children in school. Child clubs has not only reduced the student absenteeism but also encouraged their parents to involve in school activities in Nepal. As participation refers involving in the particular subject for decision making that affect their lives. In South Asia, within the difficulties and challenges the student are now being aware specially in progress, programs and policies which is opportunities to increase literacy [Dahal, 2014]. The child club is a group of boys and girls from diverse group following ethnic, religious, localities coming together having different skills to perform specific roles and duties for common concern [UNICEF, 2010]. The formation of child club in school provides a structure, that socializes and educates children and also create a platform to interact each other in a democratic way. For instance in Nepal, when teacher are absent in school, senior child club member facilitates the classes; they also support school management committee to monitor school [Dahal, 2014].

The concept of wash [hygiene and sanitation, drinking water including toilets facilities] is not a new notion. However the South Asian governments, schools, parents and children know the importance and potential impact of WASH in Schools. And this is the reason that the stakeholders are increasingly making investments in it. WASH facilities in schools improve attendance, health and cognitive development, increases girls' participation, establishes positive hygiene behaviors, offers the opportunity to introduce better wash practices in families and communities and addresses issues of inequity and exclusion.

The 4th South Asia Conference, held in Colombo in April 2011, committed to raise the profile of WASH in schools with the objective of ensuring that every school has functioning, child-friendly toilets, separate for girls and boys, with facilities for menstrual hygiene management [UNICEF, 2012]. Soon after that Indian government responded this concern and. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka recognized that safe drinking water, practice good hygiene, especially hand-washing with soap, and use clean toilets are crucial. It is encouraging to note that governments in South Asia consider water supply, sanitation and hygiene as basic school components and are prepared to make the investments needed to secure this [UNICEF, 2012].

Child right organization, parents and children, teacher, social opinion leader and human rights activists frequently raised the voice for the declaration as school as zone of peace in Nepal. This voice was in peak when there was 10 years long insurgency in Nepal. However, after almost five years of comprehensive peace agreement, the voice of education stakeholder was materialized in 2011 by declaring educational institutions as a peace zone. This was an initiative to keep educational institutions away from politics, strikes and other forms of obstructions and violence. After declaring the peace zone, the government also directed to make all the school buses having same color so that no one cannot stop or attack on it. This policy prohibits the entrance of any gun man [rebel or government forces] in the school. This is an example initiative for other SAARC neighboring countries as well.

## 7. Results and Discussion

A questionnaire after pre-testing was circulated among all the SAARC Member States for primary data collection to know the perceptions of various stakeholders. A semi-qualitative survey was conducted on 328 respondents, which were selected from various sub-sectors of education including vocational education, HRD, education planners, education administration and civil society experts working on this area in all the eight SAARC Member States. The primary data collected was examined for analysis of results. The number and percentage of interviews those were conducted are shown in Table 15:

**Table 16: Distribution of Participants**

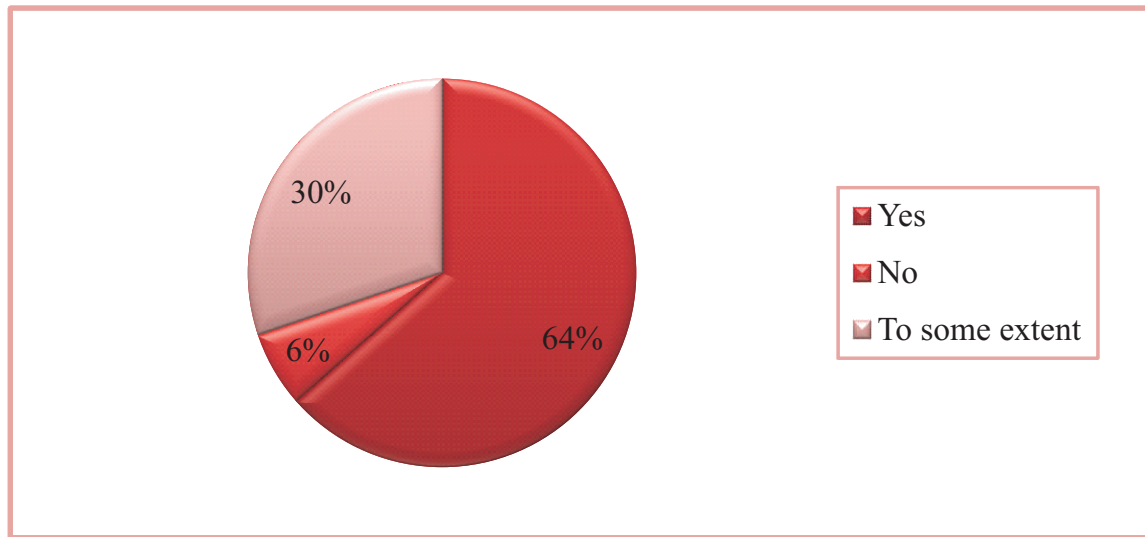
Member State	Percent	Number
Afghanistan	11	37
Bangladesh	10	31
Bhutan	09	30
India	24	78
Maldives	10	31
Nepal	13	41
Pakistan	15	50
Sri Lanka	09	30
Total	100	328

### Demographic Information

The data showed that among the respondents, 1 percent belonged to below 21 years of age, 50 percent 21-30 years of age group, 33 percent 31-40 years, 11 percent 41-50 years, and 4 percent were more than 50 years of age. The gender segregation presented that male respondents were 83 percent and female were 17 percent. The educational level showed that among the respondents, 3 percent were intermediate, the highest number [54 percent and 14 percent] were holding Masters and M. Phil degrees respectively, 19 percent were graduates and 10 percent were PhDs, the highest qualification.

### Familiar with Policies and Programs

The findings indicate that 64 percent of the respondents were acquainted with the educational policies and programs of their countries, 30 percent were familiar to some extent, whereas 6 percent doesn't know at all about the programs and policies of their respective governments to combat illiteracy.

**Figure 1: Familiar with Policies and Programs**

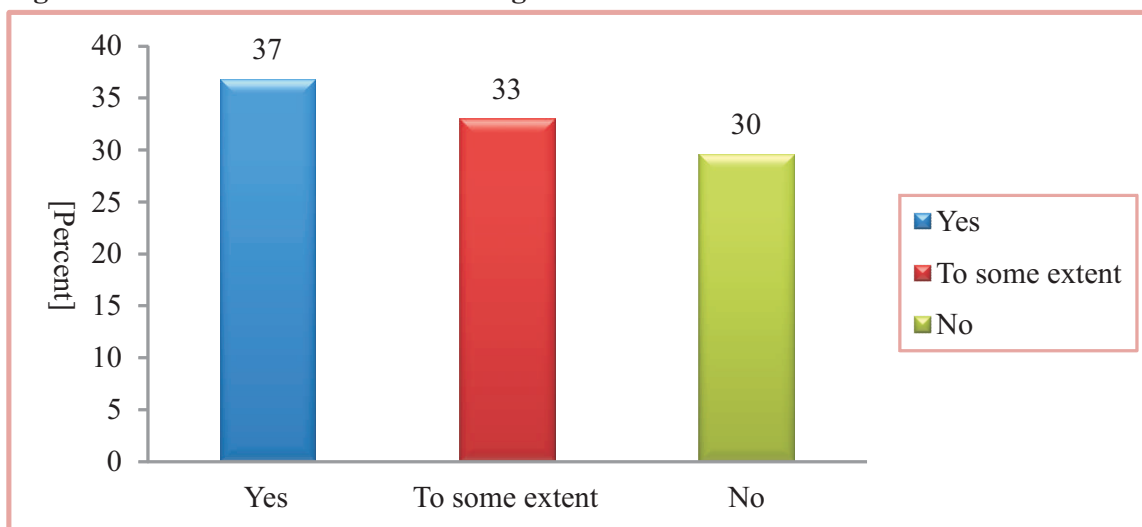
Dreze and Sen [2012] reported that almost any composite index of indicators: health, education and nutrition would place India very close to the bottom in a ranking of all countries outside Africa. Growth, of course, can be very helpful in achieving development, but this requires active public policies to ensure that the fruits of economic growth are widely shared, and also requires making good use of the public revenue generated by fast economic growth for social services, especially for public health care and public education. In at least three Indian states, universal provision of essential services has become an accepted norm. Kerala has a long history of comprehensive social policies, particularly in the field of elementary education – the principle of universal education at public expense was an explicit objective of state policy in Travancore as early as 1817.

Tilak [2001] studied that once education is regarded as critical factor for development, it has to be reflected in the pattern of allocation of resources. Particularly countries that lack the historical advantage of huge investments in education have to allocate a reasonably high proportion of national incomes, and a reasonably high proportion of their government budgets to education. But the priority accorded to primary education is inadequate in poor developing countries of South Asia. It follows that first level education and literacy need to be emphasised particularly in relatively less developed countries like the South Asian ones, where universalization of primary education is still not in place and mass illiteracy predominates. Such a policy prescription ignores the links between and inter-dependence of various levels of education, and evidence testifying to the links between education and economic growth.

### **Satisfied with Policies and Programs**

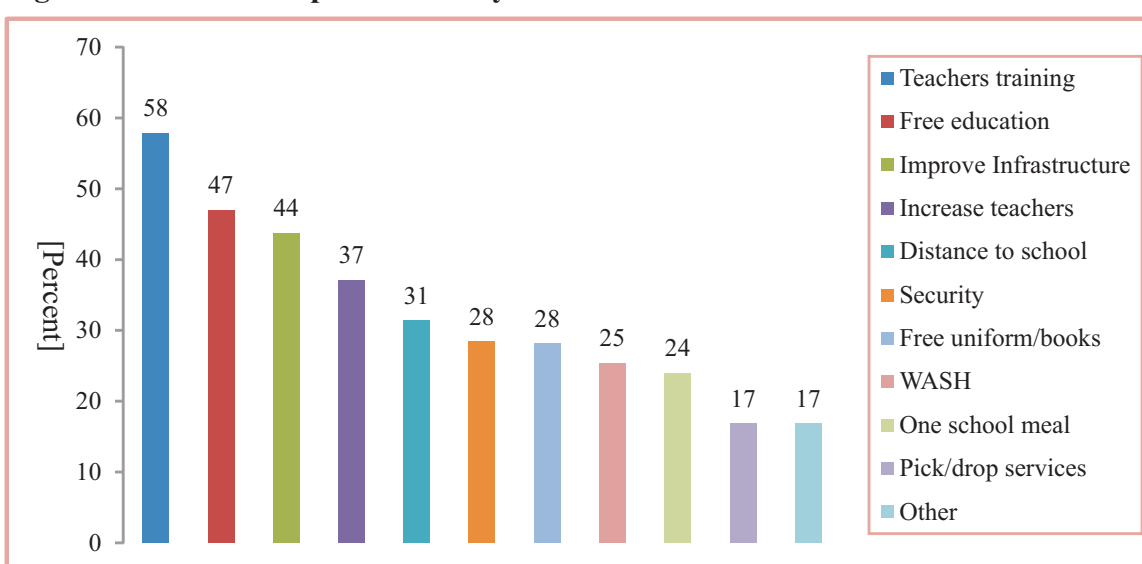
Among the respondents who were familiar with the government policies and programs of education 37 percent appreciated, 33 percent were contented to some extent and 30 percent were not satisfied from these policies and programme to combat illiteracy.



**Figure 2: Satisfied with Policies and Programs**

### Policies to Improve Literacy Rates

With regard to the policies to improve literacy rates respondents had different opinions for measures to improve literacy rates, 58 percent viewed that there is need for more trained teachers, 47 percent said education should be totally free, and 44 percent replied that infrastructure of educational institutions should be improved. Increase in number of teachers was view of 37 percent, distance of school [33 percent], and security and free books/uniform should be provided by schools as viewed by 28 percent; 25 percent responded that water and sanitation should be prioritized in policies, 24 said that there should be provision of one school meal, 17 percent replied that pick and drop services may be provided to the students, and 17 percent had other reasons including separate education system for girls and boys, scholarship, religious education, cultural hurdles etc. [multiple responses].

**Figure 3: Policies to Improve Literacy Rates**

Dev [2000] reported that programs like education guarantee scheme in India, food for education in Bangladesh would be useful for improvements in schooling. The establishment of compulsory education for children is a necessary condition for the reduction and abolition of child labour.

### Vocational Education to Decrease Illiteracy

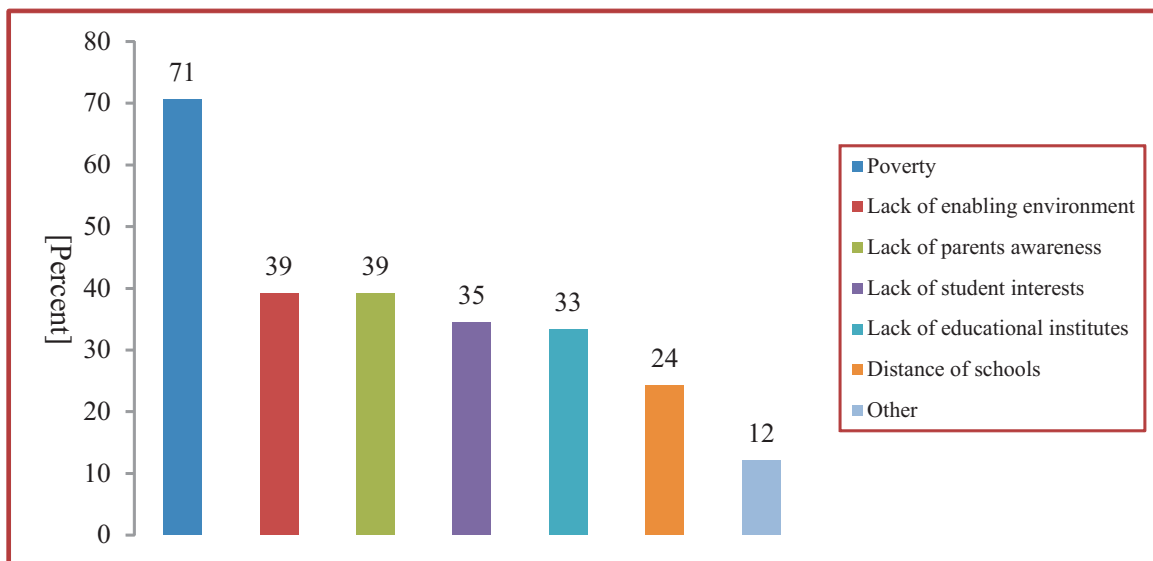
There is need for vocational education to decrease illiteracy and to improve skills as felt by 69 percent of the respondents, 29 percent agreed that it helps to some extent, whereas, 2 percent disagreed.

Barai [2014] reported that poverty is rampant, so is illiteracy. There are, for example, more illiterate women in India than in the entire continent of Africa. Moreover, the women population seem to have remained at the furthest end of poverty margin in all the countries. Unfortunately, South Asia lacks that educational infrastructure too. In South Asia, higher education seems to have grown disproportionately than mass vocational and technical education.

### Reasons for Illiteracy

In response to reasons for illiteracy 71 percent of the respondents viewed that poverty is the most significant reason of illiteracy, 39 percent said that lack of parents' awareness, and according to 39 percent lack of enabling environment are the contributing factors. Student are not interested as responded by 35 percent, less number of educational institutions as reported by 33 percent, distance of school from home as replied by 24 percent, and 12 percent mentioned other reasons including child labour, gender discrimination, teachers attitude etc. [Multiple responses].

**Figure 4: Reasons for Illiteracy**

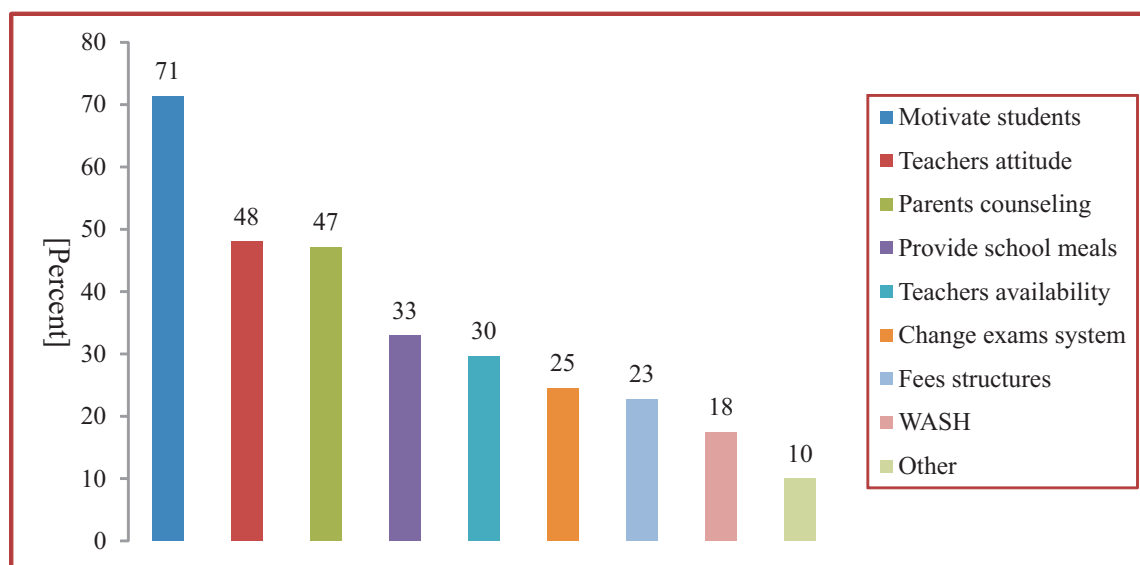


South Asia probably rates one of the highest in terms of human deprivation. It is overwhelmed with poverty, illiteracy, and low life expectancy. One third of South Asians live below the poverty line and the looming climate-induced maladies may exacerbate the scenario leading to massive migration of population [Rahman, 2011].

## Measures to Combat Declining Enrollment

In response to measures needed to combat declining enrollment 71 percent of respondents replied that it can be combated by motivating students, 48 percent said improvement in teachers' attitude, 47 percent said parents' counseling, and 33 percent viewed by providing school meals. Similarly, 30 percent said teachers' availability, 25 percent change exams system, 23 percent fees structures, 18 percent said water and sanitation issues and 10 percent mentioned other issues including gender discrimination, early marriage, student beating etc. [Multiple responses].

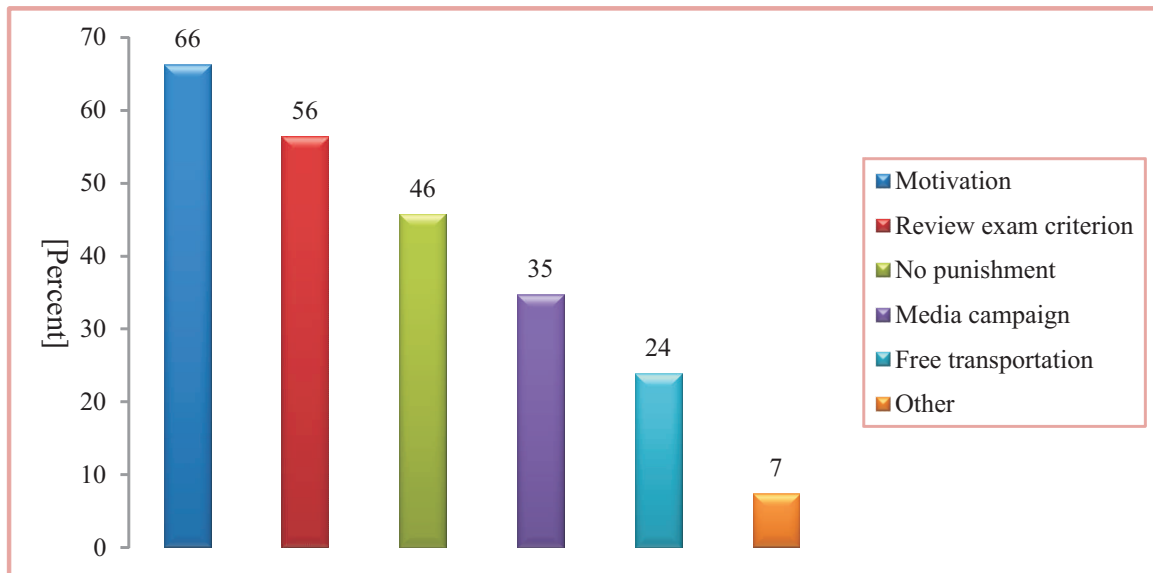
**Figure 5: Measures to Combat Declining Enrollment**



World Bank [2007] reported that South Asia's stock of human capital is clearly still low compared with that in other parts of the world. However, the evidence indicates continuous skill upgrading in the region over time. Trends in enrolment rates over time could answer many questions raised, but the limited availability of household surveys at different points in time for all countries in the region makes the use of enrolment rates to compare trends over time difficult.

## Measures for Students to Stay Enrolled

What measures may be adopted for students to stay enrolled 66 percent of the respondents viewed that motivating students, 56 percent said reviewing the examination system and 46 percent replied no punishment. Media may be used to influence students as replied by 35 percent, 24 percent said that free education, and 7 percent responded that other measures like teachers' attitude, female teachers, parents' awareness etc. [Multiple responses].

**Figure 6: Measures for Students to Stay Enrolled**

### Illiteracy in Rural Areas

Rural areas are severely affected by the illiteracy across the region in this regard 66 percent respondents viewed that increasing number of schools will improve the situation, 56 percent said motivating parents, 53 percent said better infrastructure is needed, 48 percent said motivating girls, and 26 replied that following local norms can bring the change. All family participate in harvesting crops so 19 percent said that harvesting schedules may followed, 6 percent mentioned other reasons including family/relatives oppression, gender discrimination, child labour etc. [Multiple responses].

**Table 17: Illiteracy in Rural Areas**

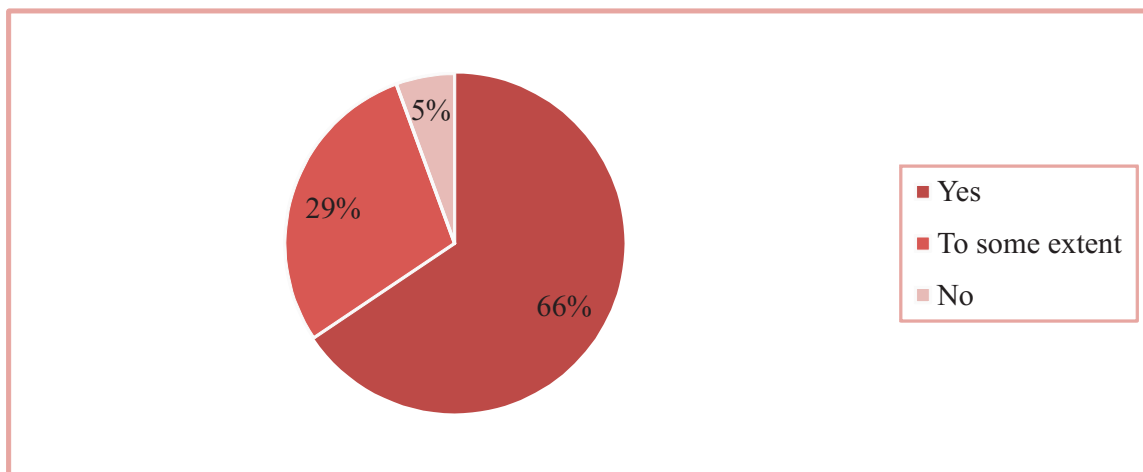
Reasons of Illiteracy	Percent
Increase number of schools	66
Motivate parents	56
Better infrastructure	53
Motivate girls	48
Follow local norms	26
Follow harvesting schedules	19
Other	06

Kumar and Mir [2014] in their study on 'SAARC: organisation, aspects, constituency and working' reported that despite some improvements in the past decades, the literacy rates remained disappointingly low throughout the South Asia, particularly in rural areas. This high illiteracy rate weakens the family planning efforts, limit farmer's abilities to utilize technological improvements, and produce labour efficiency in the general manufacturing sector. The adult literacy rate [57.6percent] of the region is lowest in the world. South Asia is still lagging in literacy chart and is figuring very low as compared to developed countries which are about to touch the three figure mark in literacy rate.

### Stipend and School-meal to Address Child Labour

Stipend and school-meals can help to address the child labour issues, as viewed by 65 percent of the respondents, 29 percent said that to some extent, and 6 percent declined.

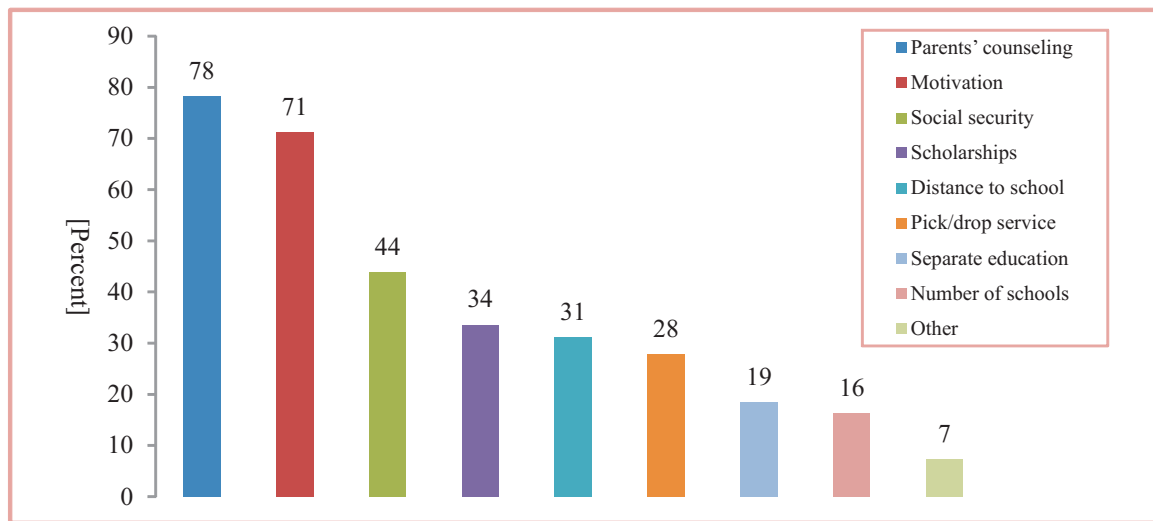
**Figure 7: Stipend and School-meal to Address Child Labour**



Baland and Robinson [1998] reported that child labour can be inefficient even in a model where parents are fully altruistic towards their children because there can be a commitment problem between parents and children. If parents run out of resources to educate the child, they have to borrow against child's future income. However, a commitment problem arises because when children are adults, their parents cannot control them and children cannot credibly commit to transfer part of their [higher] income to the parents to compensate them.

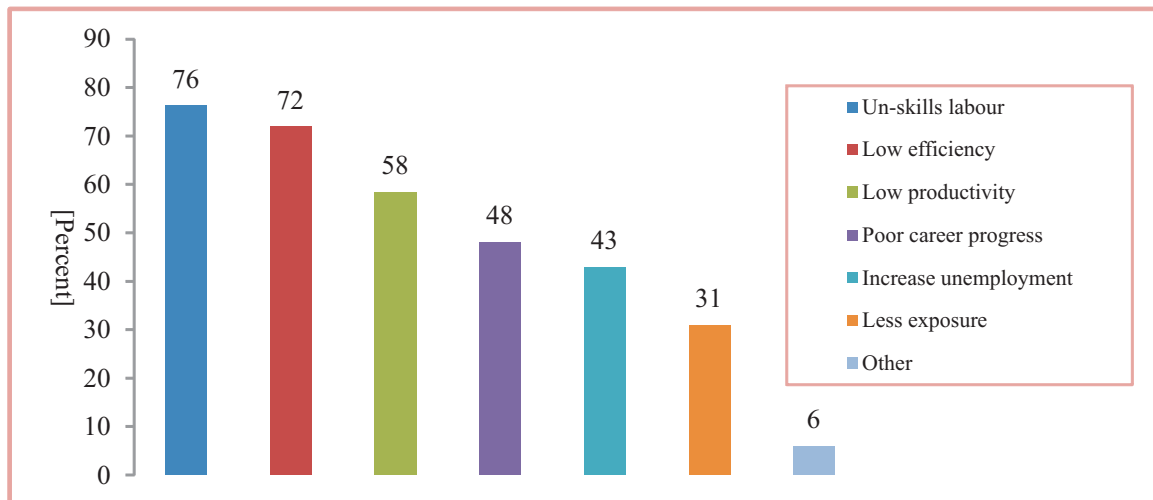
### Increase in Girls' Enrollment

Increase in girls' enrollment will help to decrease female literacy rates as it is one of the major issues in the region, in this context, 78 percent respondents were of the opinion that parents' counseling may bring desirable results, 71 percent said motivation, 44 percent supported social security, and 34 percent said that scholarships for girls'. Distance to schools also matters a lot as replied by 31 percent, 28 percent said pick and drop service, 19 percent said separate education is preferred by girls' families, 16 percent said increase in number of schools, and 7 percent mentioned other reasons including motivating father/brother, religious schooling, female teachers etc. [Multiple responses].

**Figure 8: Increase in Girls' Enrollment**

### Illiteracy Impact on Human Resource Development

Illiteracy impact human resource development in many ways as responded by 76 percent of respondents as illiteracy bring only un-skilled labour in the labor market, 72 percent said that workers not efficient, 58 percent said that they are less productive, and 48 percent replied that illiteracy bring poor career counseling. Illiteracy also increase unemployment in the market, 31 percent said that it provides less exposure to the labor force, and 6 percent had other reasons including poor health, gender discrimination, poverty etc. [Multiple responses].

**Figure 9: Illiteracy Impact on Human Resource Development**

Barro and Lee [2001] studied that human capital particularly that attained through education has been emphasized as a critical determinant of economic progress. A greater amount of educational attainment implied more skilled and productive workers, who in turn increase an economy's output of goods and services. An abundance of well-educated human resources also helps to facilitate the absorption of advanced technologies from developed countries.



## Recommendations

Based on the results of primary data and review of literature and policies, some comprehensive measures are required to re-visit the policies and plans of education for promotion of HRD in the SAARC region:

1. Given the public sector education projects, the private sector's potential to address illiteracy, and the high efficiency; the question is, should government sector involve private sector. In case of some countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka where private sector is not encouraged to provide education, public sector should retain its provider role; while gradually outsourcing in the areas where private providers can do well.
2. Parents/guardians are willing to afford private school fees and that demand for private school graduates in the certain classes is gradually increasing. Expansion of private sector has assisted governments to increase competition and to reduce education costs.
3. The education system may be geared to produce students with social and moral attitude and knowledge for self-personality development, so that enrolment in schools can be maintained and number of school leavers can be reduced.
4. The governments in the region have developed partnerships with NGOs to address illiteracy at all levels. The public departments may accredit NGOs programs. They may enhance their coordinating, monitoring, and quality controlling role in the requisite sectors.
5. Public sector may call NGOs to work them to reduce illiteracy or NGOs may fund into governments prevailing projects, so that ultimate goal can be addressed. This strategy may aim to reduce poverty and be cost-effective.
6. The objective of the education system should be on the reduction of illiteracy and increase enrolment that also supports the economic development. For this purpose, policy makers should focus on essential structural reforms for the development of a knowledge-based economy which promote literacy for disadvantaged groups.
7. The HRD policies and programs in line with economic and labor market policies may lead to address illiteracy for female, rural areas, poor, slums, etc.
8. Regular trainings of teachers on motivation, morality and child care, enrolment, counseling, society, anthropology to address illiteracy in the respective communities.
9. Promotion and public awareness campaigns on education may also bring fruitful results to reduce illiteracy and increase enrolment. Public messages on TV, radio, newspapers etc. by the celebrities may also bring needful results.
10. Establish more institutions in number for easy access of communities especially to promote girls' education in societies where cultural and social norms are found key hurdles for girls' enrolment. Small primary schools in villages may also be established to address illiteracy and retain students' enrolments.

11. Establish centralized system of students' enrollment and programme records of all the schools to facilitate tracking and evaluating the performance of school administration.
12. Local governments should advertise their policies and programme on free education, free books, one meal, and free uniform to motivate parents to enroll their children.
13. The government may also focus for improved situation of security, water, sanitation, school building etc. to retain enrolment and attract parents for engaging children in education.
14. Public sector may impose on teachers to increase enrolment, and close the teachers otherwise; similar strategies have been proven its concrete results in form of increasing enrolment in the villages and communities.
15. Both public and private vocational schools may be increased for higher employment in the poor localities, specifically in cities where poverty rate are higher.
16. Punishments, failing in exams, teachers' attitude, and economic issues are some of salient issues of drop out from schools. School administration may train teachers' to address these issues in innovative and effective way.

## Conclusion

The governments of the SAARC Member States have planned number of policies and programs to combat illiteracy, especially in rural areas, among females in spite of prevailing number of social, economic and cultural hindrances. It is accepted that access to education is the basic right of every citizen. It is most important tool for developing skilled HR, and for achieving the sustainable economic growth. Illiteracy has been proved as one of the key element which also sustain as counterweight to societal and economic motion forwarded by prevailing preferences. The SAARC region may consider illiteracy responsible for weak economic growth due to unproductive and unskilled/ semi-skilled labour force. At the country level, illiteracy is correlated to poor returns in earnings. The contemporary world scenario brings modern openings and tasks, and only those countries can get benefit, which have acquainted with modern skills and expertise. There are millions of education institutions across the region, of which merely few number cater to rural children and girls.

In the SAARC region, the illiterates have to tackle lots of social issues, prone to unhealthy circumstances, low cadre, low productivity etc. Illiteracy of the elders in the families hampers the younger at various spheres of life including their career counseling, future endeavors, personality grooming and professional cadres. The greater a mother's schooling, the fewer behavioral problems her children will exhibit, and the lower their repetition rate will be.

The poor families often prioritize work against education, due to the opportunity cost of the latter. The pressing need to work, in order to assist support their families, is the chief cause of school dropout among young people. Moreover, the temptation to leave school is increased by the perception that those who complete their education are not rewarded with wages and job prospects. Poor youth are more inclined to leave school as a result. Illiteracy and dropout ratio has hampered HRD process, productivity and economic development process. Although, modern day working patterns depends largely on machines, but need of skilled human empower the whole system and handicapped without the requisite skills.

Improving girls' participation in education and development interventions need to be equally prioritized in all the SAARC countries as a part of school reform. Education system in most of the region has achieved gender parity at primary level but still lagging behind at secondary and tertiary levels. Governments in the region are tackling this issue by introducing targeted measures aimed at promoting equity in education.

The illiterate workers suffer from low motivation, innovation, self-believe, more dependent and less able to understand vital working environment. The illiterate persons ultimately stayed beyond from the certain rights due to their limited knowledge and access. These rights are bestowed to them by privilege laws and regulations. Illiteracy disables the individuals to inactively promote the rights which are indispensable to human dignity.

The SAARC system can be used as effective platform and futuristic opportunity for sharing common contemporary development in socio-economic context and similar educational development challenges – to articulate policy objectives, goals and strategies for post-2015 education agenda. A common framework for the South Asia position can be articulated as the discourse on post- 2015 education agenda continue in the run-up in line with the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] 2030. The poor and the disadvantaged must not be left out from a resurgent and emerging South Asian century. All Member States should have stake in it and claim their due by expanding their own capabilities through combating illiteracy.

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**Annex****Questionnaire**

A.	Demographic Information				
1.	Name of respondent:				
2.	Address:				
3.	Gender:				
4.	Age [years]:				
5.	Education [completed years]:				
6.	Country:	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India
		Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka

B.	Policies and Programmes to Combat Illiteracy		
1.	Are you familiar with the policies and programs of your government to combat illiteracy?		
	Yes	No	To some extent
2.	If yes, are you satisfied with the government policies and programs:		
	Yes	No	To some extent

1.	What policies should government may adopt to improve the literacy rates ?	
	Teachers training	Increase number of teachers
	Distance to school	Free education
	Improve Infrastructure	One school meal
	Water and sanitation provision	Security
	Pick and drop services	Free uniform/books
	Any others [specify]:	

1.	Can vocational education help to decrease illiteracy and improve skills?		
	Yes	No	To some extent
	If yes, how?		
	If No, why?		

C.	Determinants of Illiteracy for HRD	
1.	In your opinion, what are the reasons for illiteracy in your country? [multiple choice]	
	Poverty	Lack of student interests
	Lack of educational institutes	Lack of enabling environment
	Lack of parents awareness	Distance of schools
	Any others [specify]:	

1.	What measures can be taken to address declining enrollment? [multiple choice]	
	Motivate students	Provide school meals
	Teachers attitude	Change exams system
	Parents counseling	Teachers availability
	Water/ sanitation availability	Fees structures
	Any others [specify]:	

D.	Strategies to Address Illiteracy	
13.	What measures can motivate students to stay enrolled in schools? [multiple choice]	
	Review exam criterion	No punishment
	Motivation	Media campaign
	Free transportation in cities	Other [specify]:

13.	How illiteracy can be addressed in rural areas of your country? [multiple choice]	
	Increase number of schools	Better infrastructure
	Motivate girls	Follow local norms
	Motivate parents	Follow harvesting schedules
	Any others [specify]:	

14.	Can stipend and school-meal help to address the issues of child labour?		
	Yes	No	To some extent

15.	How girls' enrollment can be increased in schools? [multiple choice]	
	Parents' counseling	Motivation
	Distance to school	Pick and drop service
	Social security	Separate education
	Scholarships	Number of schools
	Any others [specify]:	

16.	In your opinion, does illiteracy have impact on Human Resource Development [HRD]?	
	Yes	No
	To some extent	
	If No, why?	

17.	If yes, what is the impact of illiteracy on HRD? [multiple choice]	
	Un-skills labour	Low efficiency
	Low productivity	Poor career progress
	Increase unemployment	Less exposure
	Any others [specify]:	



